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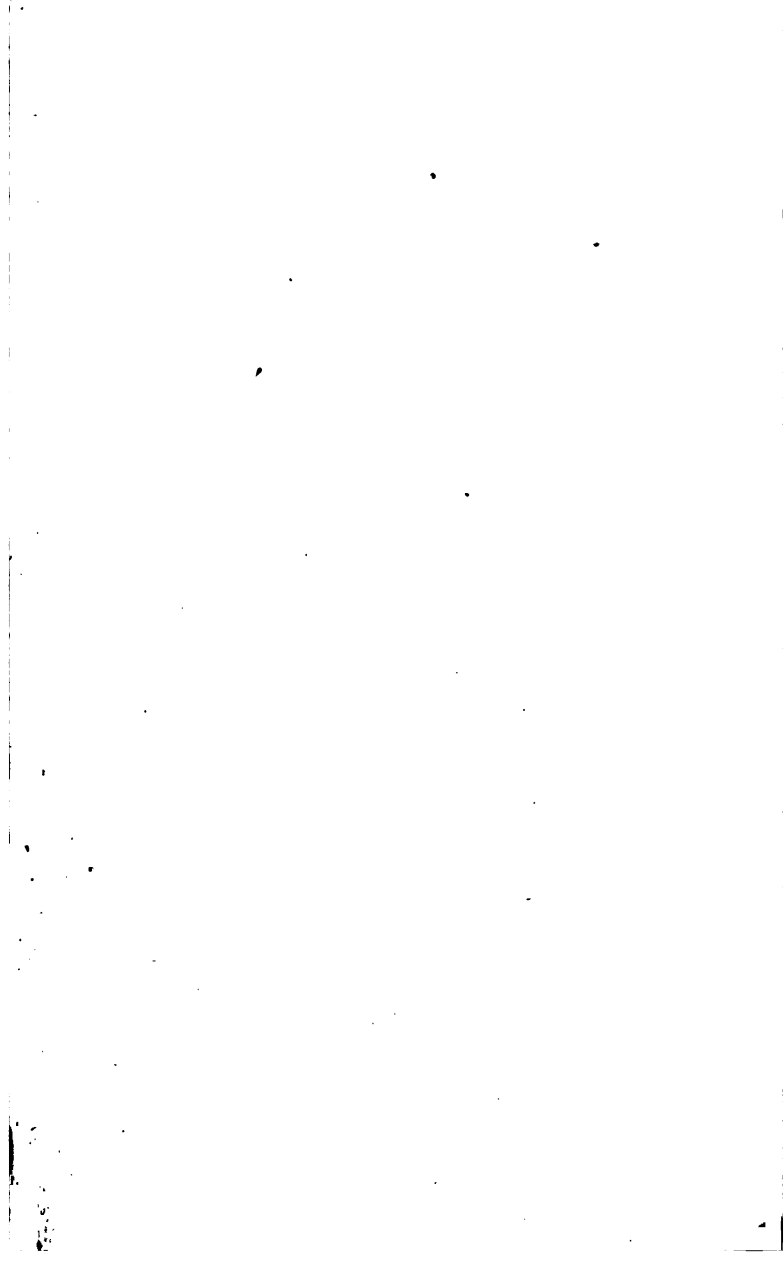
The
Curate of Cumberworth
and the
 Vicar of Roost.

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THE
Curate of Cumberworth:
AND THE
Vicar of Roost.

TALES

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE OWLET OF OWLSTONE EDGE,"
"S. ANTHOLIN'S," ETC.

Page, Francis

"While I touch the string,
Wreath my brows with laurel,
For the tale I sing
Has for once a moral!"—MOORE.

LONDON:
JOSEPH MASTERS, ALDERSGATE STREET,
AND NEW BOND STREET.

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FROM THE AUTHOR TO THE READER.

GOOD READER,

IF any one should tell you that these tales are a mere libel on the Clergy, beneficed and unbeneficed; that the object of that which is entitled, "The Curate of Cumberworth," is to represent our Curates as a body of men opinionative, self-satisfied, jealous, meddlesome, —assuming as a matter of course when they enter upon a parochial charge, that whatever is, is wrong, and liking nothing heartily which they have not originated themselves: and that it is the design of "The Vicar of Roost" to portray our Incumbents as self-seeking, self-indulgent, domineering, insincere, I pray you not to believe a syllable of the charge, but to read and judge for yourself. "Read" (if I may make the words of good Bishop Sanderson my own) "without gall or prejudice. Let not truth fare the worse for the plainness. Catch not at syl-

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lables and phrases. Study to seek the Church's peace.

“’Tis an ill bird that bewrays its own nest.”

A parson writes this volume who commenced his ministry in a curacy, and finds himself at its close in a benefice. From his own experience, therefore, he can sympathise with the difficulties of either state, and knows (as no layman could) the temptations and infirmities from within, and the sore trials of faith and patience from without, which beset all, of whatever rank, who are exercising the office of the ministry.

And therefore, in no censorious spirit, but as fully conscious that he himself is more liable than most to be met with the retort, “Physician, heal thyself,” has he ventured to write upon the subjects broached in the ensuing pages. Depicting scenes and persons, possible, indeed, but, it is to be hoped, not very probable, his purpose has been (by the instrumentality of sketches,—out of drawing,—over-coloured,—exaggerated,—grotesque, if you will,) to point out the tendency to which certain tempers and dispositions, if unchecked, will lead; and the manner in which they will interfere with, and mar Ministerial exertions. It is the further object of these fictions to remind those whose destiny calls them to work together in the same

parish, that there is constant need of mutual consideration and forbearance ; that Curate and Incumbent have alike their infirmities and frailties, errors of judgment and deficiencies in conduct ; that each needs allowance from the other, patient treatment, and charitable construction of motives.

“*Veniam petimusque damusque vicissim,*” must be the maxim guiding our daily life, if that life is to produce peace to ourselves, and benefit to those committed to our trust. No parish can be worked as it ought to be, where the Incumbent and Curate are rivals, instead of fellow-labourers and true yoke-fellows ;—where the one is jealous of the other, and both, to use the common expression, are “pulling different ways :” while in those parishes where the Clergy act harmoniously together, sharing the heat and trials of the day with willing minds, and bearing, so far as they can, each other’s burdens ; where they discharge their duties in full confidence that, whether absent or present, each is strengthening the hands of the other ; that, upon principle, each will always do his best to aid his fellow-worker in his exertions ; there we invariably see the most earnest efforts, and the most successful results for the promotion of God’s glory, and the welfare of souls.

In the main, the connexion of Incumbent and Curate is one of mutual respect and goodwill; but still, in some cases, the one class holds aloof from the other, and thus opportunities of doing good are lost, and the enemy acts successfully upon the vile old principle of "Divide, et impera." It is in the hope of drawing attention to the evils thence ensuing that these tales have been written. The work, indeed, may be ill done, or in a manner, the wisdom of which may be questioned; (if so, may another do it better!) but still it is to be hoped that any earnest effort to point out an evil which may be injurious to the Church's interests, and the welfare of souls, will be met with kind and patient consideration, as being evidence at least of the writer's hearty desire to contribute to the well-being and well-doing of the brethren, and to the peace and stability of the Church in England.

Thine, good Reader, in the earnest hope that you may find pleasure in reading, and profit from the moral of my tales,

THE AUTHOR.

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The Curate of Cumberworth.

"You will temporize with the hours."

Much ado about nothing.

The Curate of Cumberworth.

CHAPTER I.

AN ARRIVAL.

"A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill."

Hamlet.

"FOREST-SIDE and Cumberworth ! Forest-side and Cumberworth Station ! Any passenger for Cumberworth ?" shouts the porter, concentrating his whole power of accentuation on the last syllable, and as if he meant to convey the impression that worth is more heavily encumbered than any other quality.

"Any passenger for Cumberworth ?" is the cry, as the wheezing, puffing, screeching monster of the rail comes with a grinding craunch to an impatient stand-still before a wooden shed on the most elevated point of a high embankment.

"Here, here, porter ! let me out : I'm for

Cumberworth." And a black head with a hat on it, and a white stock buckled stiffly round its neck, and a black coat on the shoulders of the body to which the head belonged, was thrust, crane-like, out of a carriage window.

"Now, sir, what luggage have you?"

"Two portmanteaus; a carpet bag; a square deal box; hat box; cloak and umbrella: seven articles in all. Name, John Smith; Reverend John Smith, on a blue luggage-label. Oh! I say, Guard, what a shame it is that you don't keep your time better. Bradshaw says,—no, no, that's not mine: that's a fish-basket, and the name is Squelch, not Smith. No, I've nothing to do with gun-cases either; other things to think of! Bradshaw says 5.37 p.m., and it is 5.49, London time."

"Can't help Bradshaw, sir. Is *that* your box?"

"Well, it looks like it. I can't be sure. Look whether it has a blue label. No: don't you see Harrison in big letters?"

A grunt of impatience from the guard, who buries himself once more in the depths of the luggage-van, hurling down "Glass; with care" as if it were adamant: throwing "This side upward" down on its face: burying "Perishable" goods as though they had already perished: pushing, thrusting, precipitating, smashing all

that impeded him with that characteristic energy which railway officials are wont to exhibit when they are in a hurry; and with a full dose of those strong expletives in which they are apt to indulge when the weather is sultry.

Meanwhile, the Reverend John Smith added fuel to the flame. "Bradshaw!" he exclaimed, as he turned from a placard on the platform to the sweltering guard. "Why 5.37 is the time specified on your own way-bill; and 'tis 5.52 now. If your trains don't keep to their time—"

"All the trains are overloaded, sir," said the porter, apologetically; "thousands of people going to Kettleby. The day after to-morrow Prince Albert is to be there, to open—"

"A bundle of rubbish!" ejaculated the parson, pushing away a dilapidated carpet-bag that was proffered him. "If your trains don't keep to their time, we must write to 'the *Times*.'"

"We shall make our time good, sir, by then we reach Kettleby, if you'll have the goodness to point out your own luggage," answered the guard, in that modified tone which is often induced by the threat of an appeal to the newspapers. "Is this your portmanteau?"

"Yes: blue luggage-label: John Smith."

Down goes the portmanteau from the top of the van to the stone pavement, with a bump, as it lighted on one end, which immediately

produced a flow, viscid and inky, from its interior.

"You should never pack your blacking among your shirts, sir," calmly observed the guard, who, from frequent repetition of the same kind of experiment, was able to divine at once what had happened. "Now, sir, what next?"

"That box,—the heavy one," cried Mr. Smith, with beautiful self-control. "Gently, gently. See there! you've stove in the bird-cage: you'll kill the parrot, if you go on in that way. What a shame it is that the property of the public isn't better protected!"

"Parrot!" ejaculated a voice from a first-class carriage, sharp and shrill, as though it belonged to the bird himself. "Parrot, sir? did you say they were hurting the parrot? my grey parrot! Goodness gracious! what cruelty! Sir! guard! man! ruffian that you are! I'll hold you answerable for any injury inflicted on my parrot!"

"Drat the parrot!" cries the guard, losing patience. "We can't stop here all night looking after your luggage, sir. Have you got it all? There's five packages in the name of Smith, and you have your cloak and umbrella on your arm. All right there!"

A shrill whistle: the wheels move on; and as the Reverend John Smith shouts, "Stop!"

stop ! I'm not sure ; I don't see the blue luggage label on this," off spurts the train, and he is left with the luggage allotted to him, "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer," and speedily discovers that his own hat-box is speeding down the line to Kettleby, while he has detained an article which does not belong to him ; an article, nevertheless, which is legibly directed to Mrs. John Smith, of Temple-Bossington, and which is the one object on which that lady's mind is at present centred, containing as it does the new London bonnet, in which she meant to make her best curtsy to Prince Albert at the approaching inauguration of the Kettleby Pantechnicon.

Let me do Mr. Smith the justice to say that nothing could be further from his intentions than to appropriate his namesake's bonnet to his own use. He had, in fact, no temptation to such an act of delinquency, for he had neither wife nor child, and he could hardly have appeared himself in a headgear of pale blue satin, wreathed about with a wreath of the *Cactus speciosissimus* ; and moreover, being used to cover his head when out of doors, he would hardly have ventured to expose himself to cold by assuming the no-covering-at-all with which at present delicate females protect themselves from the weather.

Accordingly, Mr. Smith's first thought was how he might restore the property of which he had taken involuntary possession. His next was to determine to effect a reform in the administration of the Cank and Kettleby Railway, whereby the trains should keep their proper time, and the passengers their luggage.

And having done this with the rapidity which belongs to energetic minds, my hero (for such he is) did something which was by no means a common proceeding on his part: he paused to consider what he should do next; and though there was very little of the air of Paradise about the platform, he so far imitated Milton's pair, that down its length "with wandering steps and slow," he took his "solitary way."

But he was only solitary till he got to the white gate, for there the porter headed him with a suggestion that he must surrender his ticket, and an inquiry as to what was to be done with his luggage.

"I am thinking, sir," remarked the official in green velveteen, "that may be you are the gentleman that is coming to take our parson's duty for him till he is able to get about again."

"Yes, my friend; you're right enough. I'm the new Curate. I'm going to live at Cumberworth."

"Oh, indeed, sir. For a permanency is it?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Well, sir, time runs on; and Mr. Gibson is not as young as he was. But till he met with this accident, he was always very active."

"Active; what do you mean by active?" inquired the Reverend John Smith, somewhat shortly.

"Why, sir, he was a hale man for his years; an early riser, and a good walker; and one that was always going about among his parishioners. He was a wonderful man in sickness."

"Herbs and oils, and kitchen-physic, and all that, I suppose?" suggested the new Curate.

"Bless your heart, sir, no. He knows as much as the doctors themselves: leastwise, all our folks think he does: and most of us would rather have him than the regular doctor any day."

"Ah, that's always the case with you country people," observed Mr. Smith, "you are always ready to run after . . . after . . ." "*quacks*," he would have said, but he resisted the temptation, and contented himself with dropping his voice, and muttering something about "amateur-physic."

"What age may Mr. Gibson be?" he proceeded to inquire.

"Getting on for sixty, I reckon."

"Quite one of the old school, I suppose?"

"Sir?"

"Quite one of the old school?"

"Yes, sir; very much the gentleman: very kind and courteous, with a good word for everybody; and with everybody's good word,—I mean of those whose good word is worth having. He is very much respected, is Mr. Gibson."

"A good deal of Dissent in your village?"

"No, sir. Some of the Ranters, as they call them, used to have a meeting some years back, at Onecote Heath, but they died out."

"Have you good schools here?"

"Well, I suppose there are not many that will beat them hereabouts: our parson is a wonderful man among the children. My young ones are as fond to the full of being at school as of being at home."

"Is that one of your scholars," asked Mr. Smith, pointing to a ragged boy with red, sun-burnt face, and long, white, uncombed hair, who was gathering horsedung off the road with his hands into a basket.

"Yes, sir; that's one of Joe Dale's lads: they're a rough lot, they Dales; and the parents let them run wild too soon: but Dick is still at school, I think, or should be. You're one of the parson's scholars, Dick?"

Dick gave an uncouth kind of a grin, and answered, "Ees; so they tells me, Harry."

Mr. Smith looked rather relieved at the intelligence. Dick had not at all the appearance of being a model boy; and the new Curate's spirits had rather sunk at the encomiums he had been hearing. He had a misgiving that he was coming to a place where things were well-ordered, and the current would run smoothly; and where there would be little scope for zeal and energy.

"Is the Church well attended? Have you any services on the week-days?" were the next inquiries.

"You see, sir, my business here keeps me very close to the line. I am forced to be at the station all day on week-days; and can only get to Church once on Sundays."

"The railway company ought to manage better for its servants," observed Mr. Smith. "I must see what can be done."

"Thank you, sir," answered the porter. "I should be glad enough of a little more time that I could call my own, provided the pay wasn't reduced: but with regard to the Church, sir, what I was going to say was, that there is always a good congregation when I am there. I believe there always is on Sundays."

"I am glad to hear it," said the new Curate. "And now tell me, what do you think the parish needs most?"

“ Well, sir, I’m sure I oan’t say. Nothing particular that I can think of, unless it be a new clock at the Church, or may be another shop in the place ; Miss Scumble’s goods are so uncommon dear, and the groceries are so very bad.”

Mr. Smith looked discouraged ; not at the prospect of roasted beans for coffee, and sloe leaves for tea, but at the orderly quiescence, so to speak, of Cumberworth. He wanted a large tub to splash in, and it seemed as though he would be restricted to a washhand basin.

But there was no time for further parley. “ I reckon, sir,” observed the porter, “ that you’ll be for going to the parsonage ; and if so, this is the gate that leads to it.”

CHAPTER II.

THE GUEST.

"Hot ardent zeal would set whole realms on fire."

Timon of Athens.

THE Reverend John Smith is a most worthy man. I could not name a person of such unflagging energy, tempered as it is in his maturer age with so much sound discretion, and Christian kindness,—the happiest blending of the serpent's wisdom, and the dove's simplicity. I can hardly imagine a man more fit to grapple with the cares and responsibilities of a mitre than my friend Smith. And if the time should ever come, when all the members of the Whig Cabinet should have no relations left whom they can set on episcopal thrones, and when all their wives' ladies'-maids' brothers and cousins have been promoted to deaneries, I cannot help feeling that he must inevitably be made a Bishop. At present (1857) the Premier has made but little progress in serving his friends, in consequence of the insatiable vitality of the

existing prelates, some of whom carry out their opposition to the very extremity of rancorous longevity; but it is to be hoped that if (as seems likely) this should be a good year for stone-fruit, there may be a heavy fall of Bishops in the plum season; or that some measure of compulsory resignation may be adopted, (at any rate with respect to the richer sees,) which may open them to Whig expectants; or that some arrangement, comfortable or simoniacal, either or both (it is immaterial which), may be made, which shall give to the Church a supply of the only class of persons at all qualified to hold large spiritual preferment,—the relations, I mean, of Cabinet Ministers.

If, however, such a state of things should occur at some future time, (most improbable, indeed, but not impossible) as that the supply of mitres should exceed the demand for them, and the Prime Minister should be obliged to make an appointment without reference to Cabinet-connections, then I must say that the Reverend John Smith is the most likely person for the first see left vacant under such melancholy circumstances; and I can with very great sincerity add that—"I wish he may get it!"

But my business is not with Mr. Smith as he is now, but as he was when he entered on his first pastoral charge,—that is, before he had

been engaged in the highly practical work of buying his experience, and while as yet he knew nothing of the sensation which results to the man who burns his fingers.

Everybody, I suppose, has holes in his coat somewhere; but if Mr. Smith was in the same condition with the rest of the world, his rents and tears must have been very few in number, or they lay very much out of sight.

He was a superlatively good boy at school; was never seen out of bounds; was never known to be imperfect in his lesson. The only irregularities with which he was ever connected were the irregular verbs in the grammar: the only duties he ever declined were the nouns in the same compendium; and these he declined with avidity. He delighted in making maps of Asia Minor, and could spottle an impromptu *Ægean* with wriggling islands,—every one in the right place; every one of the right shape; and every one with the right name. Everything connected with spirits and accents had a charm for him. His *Alcaics* were such that old Smout the headmaster (who died Bishop of Bangham, in his ninetieth year, and in black worsted stockings) predicted therefrom his future eminence in Church or State; while his *Latin Essay* on some of the peculiarities of *Peloponnesian Politics*, was thought so clever, that the Chan-

cellor of the Exchequer heard of it, and is reported to have inquired whether he was any relation to Sydney of S. Paul's.

And it was just the same at the University. Before he had been half a year at Christ Church he carried off Lady Blennerhassett's Exhibition for the best translation of Hudibras into Elegiac verse, the Tupperian Scholarship for Proverbial Philosophy, and the Fettiplace Medal for a treatise on Lydian Measures ; and before he ceased to be an under-graduate, he obtained so many Chancellor's prizes that it was commonly supposed that his head must be always in Chancery.

But this was not all, or the best. John Smith was a thoroughly steady, regular, well-conducted young man. His moral conduct was above all praise ; and Censors and College-tutors were never weary of pointing out Mr. Smith as a model worthy of imitation by the juniors of all orders and ranks.

It would have been no great wonder if, at the close of such a successful career, John Smith's head had been somewhat turned. But it was not so. He retained his humility and simplicity to the end, and if some tinge of human infirmity was apparent to those who were most intimate with him, its form seemed a very venial one. He was so much in earnest in all he did, that he seemed sometimes as

though he could not realize the notion that any one could be as much in earnest as himself.

It had long been his heart's desire to enter into Holy Orders. Lest I should create a prejudice against so good a man in the minds of the Christians in the Potteries, who seem to have peculiarly charitable and sapient notions on the subject of clerical education, I shall not deem it necessary to state whether Mr. Smith did or did not pursue a course of study at any one of our Theological Colleges. He might, or might not have been familiar with the Vicar's Close at Wells: he might, or might not have braced his lungs by the frequent ascent of Wheatley Hill. Let that pass. Somewhere or other he passed through a course of careful study for his sacred profession, and he was not without the benefit of a wise adviser in the selection and application of his studies.

But I am sorry to say that the general impression left on John Smith's mind with respect to the adviser in question, was that "Good old Hammond was—*rather slow*."

Whether Hammond was slow, or Smith impetuous, the reader will, if he have patience, have the opportunity of judging; but the point which staggered Smith was this. Hammond was rather disposed to controvert the doctrine that no Parson,—say of the age of fifty, and upwards,

—could know anything about the work of a parish.

“Of course, I don’t mean to dispute for a moment that there are hundreds, thousands, of pious, hard-working men among the middle-aged and elderly clergy,” was Smith’s remark; “but it is not in the nature of things that, labouring as they did, under such heavy disadvantages as they must have done in their youth, when the standard of clerical acquirements was so low, they can be as efficient as those who are admitted to Holy Orders now-a-days.”

“The experience of years will have given them a knowledge of the human heart, Mr. Smith, which will be of more value to a class of men whose business it is to train and direct it, than the most brilliant attainments which are superficial.”

Mr. Smith was silent, but not convinced.

“Knowing you as well as I do,” said his friend, “I am satisfied that nothing but the highest motives have influenced you in the choice of your profession, and that your heart’s desire is to make your parish a model parish. Is it not so?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“And how do you propose to set about your task?”

“Why, of course by making a change in all matters which are going on unsatisfactorily.”

"And you will do this at once?"

"Well, there is nothing like striking while the iron is hot. A new broom is expected to sweep clean."

"I have known valuables swept into a dust-pan before now, in consequence of the hot haste of a housemaid. I suppose that before you make your changes you will allow yourself time to consider 'what you change from, what you change to, and where you will make an end of changing.'"

"Certainly, certainly, my good friend: but some things cry out so loudly for reform in every parish, that the sooner one commences one's alterations the better."

"I am not so sure of that, Mr. Smith. If you will take my advice, you will begin by making no changes at all. You will find it your true wisdom, as well as charity, to assume that there is some good reason why things are in the state in which you find them; that your predecessor watched over souls as believing that he must hereafter give account, and that therefore it is only right to believe until the contrary conviction be forced upon you, that you may only make bad worse by suddenly changing things which he tolerated."

"But consider, sir, how great a work is to be done, and how short a time is allotted us for doing it."

"It is that very consideration, Mr. Smith, which causes me to offer my present advice. We have so little time that we cannot afford to retrace our steps. Our work is, in faith and hope to 'go a-head.' 'Vestigia nulla retrorsum.' It may take years to undo the mistakes made through injudicious zeal at the commencement of a ministry."

"My dear sir, I beg your pardon, but clergymen of your time of life are always up in arms against 'injudicious zeal,' as they call it. Is not this like encouraging our neighbours to go to sleep, because we feel drowsy ourselves?"

"Nay rather, it is more like a warning from dear-bought experience. At any rate, however, it does not look like modesty to act as though no one was ever in earnest in the work of winning souls, but yourself. And I doubt whether the conviction of your own earnestness, and the sincerity of your desire to do good, will be a sufficient reason for risking the peace and well-doing of a parish for years to come."

"There is some truth in what old Hammond says, no doubt," observed Mr. Smith to himself; "but he has the growing timidity of age: perhaps may sacrifice to expediency: but at any rate, what he says is slow,—uncommonly slow."

CHAPTER III.

IN WANT OF WORK.

"We have caught the woodcock, and will keep him muffled."

All's well that ends well.

"WELL, my dear, and what do you think of Mr. Smith?" asked the crippled Rector of his wife, as she returned to her place beside the patient's couch, after having discharged the duties of hospitality to the new Curate.

"A very quiet, gentlemanly man, Charles, with a very poor appetite."

"Shy, perhaps?"

"Oh dear no! He talked so eagerly, that he hardly gave himself time to eat, and certainly did not know what he was eating. When I asked him whether he would not have some cream with his black currant dumpling, he thanked me, and began to help himself out of the mustard-pot."

"Nervous, I suppose?"

"Well, nervousness shows itself in very odd ways, you know, and so I can't be sure; but I

thought he seemed quite self-possessed. He almost took my breath away," added the good lady, with a short pursy gasp, quite in character with her structural economy, "by the eagerness of his manner, and the number of his questions. But he seems a very good kind of a young man, and when he is quieted down from the excitement of his journey, I make no doubt but we shall like him exceedingly. And, my dear, there is one thing which I see at the outset, and which is a very great comfort; he is evidently a kind of person who does not grudge his trouble. He seems made for exertion, and as if he could not live in any state but one of activity."

"Not a restless fidget, love, I hope?"

"He's younger than we are, my dear; and different people have different manners; and there is something rather unquiet in the spirit of the times, which seems to affect everybody except such antediluvian vegetables as you and me, Charles. But I shouldn't think that we shall find him fidgety, when he is fairly in work; though perhaps he may be a little impatient at starting. Even Dumpling is that, my dear, when he has not been in harness for a week. And what a blessing it is that we should have got a man of active character, now that you are disabled."

"I am not so sure of that, my dear," observed Mr. Gibson, rather anxiously.

"O, of course he must not be allowed to interfere, or to take the reins into his own hands; but what I meant was, that now while it is impossible that you should be mounting cottage staircases for months to come . . ."

"Weeks, my dear. Mr. Ashley said I should be off the couch in a fortnight, and soon able to go about again as usual."

"Well, I hope you may, Charles; but, at any rate, for the present you can do nothing; and meanwhile the Church, and the schools, and the sick will be carefully attended to."

"I feel quite equal to seeing him, Mary: let him come up at once."

"Really, Mr. Gibson, don't you think you would be more equal to it after a good night's rest?"

"I hope I see you better, sir," observed Mr. Smith, as, ushered into the room in the dusk, he tumbled over a footstool.

The incident would have discomposed many a man; but Mr. Smith's self-possession was not disturbed by trifles. "I hope I see you better, sir," said Mr. Smith, restoring the footstool to its place.

"Thank you, my good sir," answered the Rector, offering his hand; "the accident has

been rather troublesome than dangerous. It has been a trial to me to be kept to my bed and couch when I wished to be in the parish."

"No doubt, Mr. Gibson; but you can lay aside all your anxiety for exertion (which cannot be otherwise than imprudent) for some time to come: for here am I, 'as fresh as a daisy,' as the saying is, up to all the work you can lay upon me. Quite a trifling population, I see: four hundred and sixty-four, I think, at the last census, was it not, sir? Entirely agricultural, I presume? Village compact, so far as I could judge from the glance I got from the top of the embankment. Schools, I see, contiguous to the Church: the services, too, as I gathered from the porter who carried my luggage, a mere trifle. All seems as easy as an old shoe. You must find me some additional work, sir, or I fear I shall grow rusty."

"You speak like a young man, Mr. Smith; but I honour you for your energy and zeal for God's service. So much do I honour you, that I earnestly desire to see you maintain them to the end; and so, my good friend, if you will allow me to call you so, I must offer an old man's advice, and tell you that it is wise to husband them now."

"For fear of their running to waste, sir?"

"Well, partly, perhaps. But what I was

thinking of principally was this. It is a law of our nature that reaction follows excitement ; and the law extends to things spiritual as well as temporal. If a man be good for anything at all, he enters on the work of the ministry in the conviction that he is engaging in the most fearful responsibilities in which man can be involved, (and if we could realise at starting the extent of those responsibilities, few men, I suppose, would venture to become candidates for Holy Orders,) and therefore he enters on his office with the most complete devotion of mind and body to the work. And this lasts for a time ; longer or shorter, according to the character of the man, and his spirit of resolution and perseverance. But at last he grows weary. Disappointments, popular prejudices, ingratitude, worldliness, thwart him in his work, and the temptation to listlessness ensues. It is an hour of darkness, from which I believe none escape. But I am persuaded that of those who, having set their hands to the plough, are tempted to look back, he will master the temptation most speedily and effectually, who does not let his zeal run away with him at first, and who has not wearied himself out in skirmishing before the real fight begins."

"Well, sir, that is very much what our mutual friend Hammond has more than once im-

pressed on me, and I hope I shall not forget it ; but, in the meantime, sir, there are probably some parish matters that may require attention at once, and I am quite ready to commence operations. Is there anything I can do this evening ?”

“ I am greatly obliged, but I think not. Whatever may be necessary to be done before I get about again, I shall thankfully consign to your kind care ; but I should prefer going round the parish with you, and explaining to you how we have been accustomed to work our parochial machinery here.”

Mr. Smith’s face was clouded with disappointment ; but if the Rector of Cumberworth saw the expression, he took no notice, and went on.

“ You will require a day or two for unpacking, and looking about you, Mr. Smith ; and in any spare time you may be increasing your stock of sermons, which, as yet, can hardly be large. By the way, we are used to very short sermons here. Can you write a short sermon ?”

“ O dear, yes,” answered Mr. Smith, confidently ; “ I shall find no difficulty in that.”

“ You are much to be envied, Mr. Smith. I find nothing so difficult as to write a *short* sermon which satisfies me. A long sermon any one can write who has a moderate facility in com-

position ; but to produce a short sermon, clear, earnest, pithy, not one-sided, complete in itself, not devoid of illustration, and yet not degenerating into mere declamation, is to me a continued source of anxious difficulty : but I believe I am a stupid old man ; and I never had that practice in composition in my youth which will make these things comparatively easy to those of your generation."

"Do you think, sir, that anything is gained by such very short sermons?" asked Mr. Smith.

"Yes, sir, everything ; where, at least, as here, the congregation is unlettered. Did you ever meet with a labourer who could follow an argument for *five minutes*?"

"But surely, sir, there are many who don't think it worth while to give their attention to a short sermon, while they settle themselves down eagerly if there be a longer discourse, to listen."

"Or go to sleep," said Mr. Gibson, smiling.

"Well, sir, I will endeavour to prepare some sermons short enough for your taste : but I really hope that you will find something for me to do. The schools, now,—of course you would wish me to be present at their opening to-morrow ; and that at any rate I should take the Scripture lesson daily. I'm very fond of teaching, and I've seen so much of the new plans of instruction, that I dare say I could introduce

some improvements which have not yet found their way to country places."

"Thank you, thank you. We shall find scope for you by and by, no doubt; but at present our schools are closed. The harvest holydays began last Monday."

"Dear, dear! how unlucky! I never thought of the harvest. But your pupil-teachers? Of course they don't go harvesting? I could bring them forward during the holydays."

"Unluckily, they are gone to visit relatives at a distance, and so cannot as yet benefit by your good offices."

"Well, sir, I shall have all the more time for making myself acquainted with your flock."

"Man, woman, and child, they are all in the harvest-field. I don't suppose there is a cottage that is not locked up."

"Becky Beccles would be at home, my dear," interposed good-natured Mrs. Gibson, who saw deeper shades of disappointment stealing over the Curate's face.

"Yes, love, but you know as well as I do that Becky is rather eccentric. And for that matter, poor old Oliver Edge would be at home, but, Mr. Smith, he is as deaf as a post. The truth is as I tell you; everybody in the parish is reaping, or carrying, or gleaning."

"Have you no sick?"

"Indeed, I am thankful to say that there hasn't been a case of sickness since my own accident. There was a baby who had fits in teething, but Mrs. Gibson lanced its gums, and has made a cure."

"I think the porter told me you had some cottage lectures, or other week-day services."

"So we have, except in harvest time, and then we are obliged to suspend them for want of attendants. Harvest is a busy period in a small place like this, and every pair of hands that is available, is sure of employment."

"Well, really, sir, you seem to be most singularly situated. It is like a complete stagnation of everything, is it not?"

"O, we shall have plenty of work for you by and by: you needn't be uneasy on that score. And a quiet time for reading, which you may have for a week or two, will be no disadvantage. A year or two hence, you will be coveting the privilege, it may be, in vain."

"But, Mr. Gibson,—(excuse me, for my mind really is set upon active exertion,) is there *nothing* over which you can set me in charge?"

"Nothing, my good sir, nothing, I fear: unless, by the way,"—this was said slowly and deliberately,—"*unless* you would put yourself in charge of our church clock. Our sexton,

Dibble, is gone out for a week's holyday, to see his brother at Liverpool."

"My dear Charles," exclaimed Mrs. Gibson, in astonishment, "are you dreaming? It is only his funny way," she added, apologetically, as she read, better than a stranger could, an expression of quiet mischief lurking about the corners of her husband's mouth.

"I beg your pardon, my love. I never was more serious. If Mr. Smith will look after the clock for a few days, I shall be exceedingly obliged to him."

"It will give me very great pleasure," said Mr. Smith, "and all the more because my watch was set this morning to Greenwich time."

And being thus installed in office, Mr. Smith took his leave. No sooner had the door closed, than Mrs. Gibson broke out. "O Charles, Charles! What have you been doing? I wonder he wasn't quite offended. What in the world could induce you to keep a zealous, active young man like that, from any charge whatever except our old clock?"

"My love, if I read him right, he is a very excellent fellow; but he wants a little experience: and I have bought a good deal of my own experience so dearly, that I should be glad to help him to get his cheaply."

"Mr. Gibson, you are as dark as the Sphinx."

“Possibly, my dear. But time is the great discoverer of riddles ; and therefore that my present riddle has something to do with a clock, is all in your favour.”

And Mr. Gibson did not prolong the conversation. Only his wife observed, that as he laid his head back on his couch, he muttered to himself, in an amused tone, Talleyrand’s never-to-be-forgotten injunction,

“ET SURTOUT, MON AMI, POINT DE ZELE !”

CHAPTER IV.

NATURE DISPLAYED.

"Come, bring your luggage nobly on your back."

King Henry IV., Part I.

PEOPLE must go to bed, for even the most indefatigable grow fatigued sooner or later. The Reverend John Smith himself could not keep up his energies without sleep, though in the very midst of his slumbers he contrived to get through a good deal of work. Many were the castles which he built in the air while he lay dreaming, and perhaps, good reader, they were not more unsubstantial than some of your own waking edifices. Even Mr. Smith, however, needed rest for his body, if not for his mind. He had risen in the small hours of the day on which he had started for Cumberworth, and the small hours of another day had commenced before he took himself to repose in his new lodgings.

Good Mrs. Gibson would have detained him at the Rectory, but he was resolved to establish

himself at once in his new home ; and so, with as much luggage as he could carry, he sallied down the village-street in the dark, declining all proffered aid, resolved to find his way without assistance to his apartments at Mrs. Finch's.

It was that worthy lady's misfortune that she was what her neighbours called a very particular woman. She had been for many years the sole attendant of an aged gentlewoman, who, dying, bequeathed her the bulk of her property ; but not before Hannah Finch herself was so far advanced in life as to have settled down into a very determined old maid. Upon this accession of fortune, Hannah returned to her native village ; bought a house, and lived in it in solitary state, till Mr. Gibson induced her to take his Curate for her inmate, and so gave her what she sorely needed,—a little occupation. For hitherto, Hannah had chiefly spent her days in making her house a wonder of neatness, and in polishing up the old furniture which had descended to her as her mistress's residuary legatee.

The parlour which she then surrendered to the Curate had no very great charms about it ; but it was Mrs. Finch's glory and joy. The view from its window was not particularly cheerful ; glancing as it did over a scraggy bush of *laurustinus* to the row of white pales,

which separated the good lady's domain from the turnpike road, and thence to a bit of dead wall, adorned with the remnants of decaying handbills and placards; a small pond, innocent of ducks, but covered with duckweed, completing the prospect: which was not without its charms, however, for Mrs. Hannah; for, as she was wont to say, there was a deal of life going past her door every day; and though it was a rather dusty situation, there was always a pleasant green about the pond. The parlour itself had a white dado, and a black skirting board and doors; while that portion of the walls which was papered was covered with a design, in black and white on a grey ground, of those forked zigzags, interlaced and interlacing, which are wont to characterise the dazzles preceding a sick headache. There was a red, green, and blue Kidderminster carpet, in the most approved taste of that lovely fabric: a highly-polished dining-table, of nearly black mahogany: six chairs of the same material with black horsehair seats, and an article of furniture covered also with horsehair, called by Mrs. Hannah a settee, and deemed, as she averred, by her late mistress too luxurious for the use of any but a confirmed invalid. But whether Mrs. Crakanthorpe had indulged herself during her decline by session or recumbency thereon there

is, unfortunately, no evidence to show. A casual observer might be tempted to the too hasty inference, that if ever that lamented lady had lain upon it, she must have had the power of shutting herself up, like a pocket telescope, and that if she had sat thereon, it must have been straddle-legs. There was a cat on the chimney-piece in pasteboard and black velvet, with eyes of gold paper, and whiskers of pig's bristles, with a receptacle behind for allumettes, for which a substitute had been found in a bunch of quaking-grass. Also, there was at each end of the mantelpiece a shell-man, with a limpet on his head, and clothed in a suit of brown paper sprinkled with cowries. Such was Mrs. Finch's parlour, and so was it adorned with furniture, which was at once the pride and anxiety of her life: pride that she had such genteel property, anxiety that it should be kept in the highest state of preservation.

It was not without very considerable solicitation that she had been induced to receive a lodger. To be sure, he was a single man, and his being a young one made a great difference: she should have less difficulty in making him understand what was expected of him, for she had no notion of giving in to the whims of lodgers. Had he been a married man, she should have declined it. And as for children!

always in mischief, meddling with everything, and breaking everything with which they meddle, Mrs. Finch candidly owned that at times she had great sympathy with good King Herod's infanticidal propensities. However, to oblige Mr. Gibson, she would accommodate Mr. Blandy for a month. And such a docile patient was Mr. Blandy,—good, easy, shy, meek man,—that he was her lodger for half a dozen years; and she almost broke her heart when, through Mr. Gibson's instrumentality, he was presented to a neighbouring vicarage, which I fully expect will one day be adorned with the Crakanthorpe furniture, and whatever else of worldly goods Mrs. Finch has to bequeath. But Mr. Blandy was broken in early. The very day after his arrival, instead of hanging up his hat on the peg in the passage, he was thoughtless enough to carry it with him into the parlour, and lay it on an empty chair. Mrs. Finch coming in with the coal-scuttle, detected the impropriety in a moment, and clearing her throat very audibly, deposited the offending beaver on the floor. The unconscious Blandy, unobservant of the action, and unsuspecting of the hint, chancing to cross the room, stumbled over his hat, and replaced it on the chair. "You'll find your hat on its proper peg in the passage, sir," said the good lady, as entering

with the dinner-tray, she detected the second delinquency. If, instead of burying his nose in S. Chrysostom, Mr. Blandy had looked up, he would have read that in his landlady's face which would have roused him to a sense of his enormities; but he read on, nothing heeding, and before that eventful day was over, he had actually laid his hat (and that hat damp with rain) on the polished mahogany table. Such an act was beyond human endurance. Mrs. Finch, without condescending to expostulate, carried off the cause of offence once more, and locked it up in a cupboard in her own sleeping apartment.

Meek, absent, Mr. Blandy! vain was your search next morning; hopeless your attempts to be positive where you had laid it. Had a thief stolen it out of the passage? Had you left it in a cottage, and walked home bareheaded through the rain? Neither was impossible. But the bell was tolling for a funeral, and the hat—the only hat you possessed—was not forthcoming.

“Mrs. Finch, have you seen my hat?”

“Yes, sir,” was the reply. “As you never put it in its proper place, and seemed at a loss to know what to do with it, I thought I had better take care of it for you. I dried it, sir, before I took it up stairs: for it was so wet that

it has almost ruined my poor table. You smell the bee's-wax and turpentine, no doubt," (the poor man had been ready to faint all the morning under its influence,) "but though I was slaving at it for an hour and a half before you were up, you see the mark ; and there it will be for weeks to come."

From that scene of confusion and penitence, Mr. Blandy arose an altered man ; and as he became the most considerate, so was he the most cherished of lodgers ; and, as I have already said, I doubt not that "all the Finches of the grove," will be disinherited on his account.

To Mr. Blandy's old abode, Mr. Smith, with some little difficulty, and a trifling experience of the pond on the opposite side of the road, found his way, just as the church clock was striking ten.

"You are later, sir, than I expected," was Mrs. Hannah's salutation. "I thought you would have been here by seven o'clock."

"Ah ! I did arrive by the evening train, but I stayed some time at the Rectory."

"Well, sir, in that case there is nothing to be said ; but poor dear Mr. Blandy, who left me a year and a half ago, was very regular in his hours : he knew that I go to bed early, and never obliged me to sit up for him. A missed man, sir, is Mr. Blandy, both by rich and poor ;

and how Mr. Gibson is ever to get on without him, I don't see. It was like cutting his own throat when Mr. Gibson got him that living of Bexwood. It wasn't likely that at his time of life he could go on without a Curate. I told him I was sure he couldn't, and now, you see, my words have come true. He has broken his leg; and instead of a man like Mr. Blandy, he has been obliged to engage a young inexperienced gentleman like yourself. Not that I make any doubt, sir, that in time you will prove acceptable to the congregation, when you have learned our ways; that is, if you keep good hours, and are steady and regular, and don't come home late at night. I wouldn't discourage you for the world: but old friends, sir, are old friends, and a man like Mr. Blandy is not to be seen every day. You have had your tea, sir, I presume, at the Rectory. I have made sure, indeed, of that, and have raked the fire out: for though the house is insured, I'm very particular about fire. Shall I light your candle, sir, and show you your room?"

There were a good many hints designed for Mr. Smith's future guidance in the discharge of his duties as a lodger, in this opening address of good Mrs. Finch: but her words fell on rocky ground, or at any rate, on a soil in which they did not take immediate root. Mr. Smith had

no notion of being sent to bed by his landlady. She was welcome to go her own way, but most assuredly he meant to be his own master. He declined to go to bed, and only went up to his room in order to take off his wet boots, put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and prepare for *work*.

Mrs. Finch was rather bewildered, and hardly saw her next move; but, like a good general, determined to take a further observation before making another attack.

"You will please to be careful of the candle, sir, and of the furniture; which, you see, sir, is of a better kind than is to be found in most houses, and was, in fact, the bequest of the late Mrs. Crackanthorpe, who died universally respected."

"Oh, indeed? Ah, well, yes. Very substantial, but rather scanty. I wonder where I shall stow away my books? However, I must think of that to-morrow. I shall find a carpenter to knock up some shelves, I suppose." ("I think I see him!" muttered Mrs. Finch, to herself.) "But one can do nothing about that to-night."

"You won't be very late, sir?" inquired Mrs. Finch, still lingering at the threshold. "We are early risers at Cumberworth. You would like some warm water, sir, perhaps, towards half-past six or seven; and you can put your clothes and boots outside your door."

"Thank you, ma'am. I always get up at five, and I don't require to be called. Good night, ma'am."

Mrs. Finch had nothing to do but retire: and retire she did, but not without considerable progress towards a resolution that she would very soon put matters to a test, whether she should be mistress in her own house or no.

As for Mr. Smith, though not equal to the task of carrying two portmanteaus, a carpet bag, and a packing-case four feet square by as many deep from the Rectory, he had still contrived to bring away enough luggage to occupy him in the labours of unpacking and arranging till long after midnight. And even then he would not have betaken himself to bed, (which he did, at length, in the dark,) if it had not been that prudent Mrs. Finch kept the key of her candle-box, and that she had not supplied her lodger with more than three or four hours of illumination. However, the new Curate unpacked so many of his goods and chattels as he had brought with him; disposed everything, as he thought, in beautiful order, ready for the morrow, and satisfied himself that it was rather a brilliant idea than otherwise which suggested to him the plan of stacking such books as he had, on the Crakanthorpe settee.

It was not till he was fairly in bed, that Mr.

Smith found time to think over his reception at the Rectory.

“Odd, eccentric, old gentleman, evidently. Something sly and mischievous, too, in his eye. If it hadn’t been for his old-fashioned courtesy, I should not have felt sure that he wasn’t quizzing me. I think I shall like him, for there seems good at bottom : but he is evidently quite an original, and most likely timid and slow, like poor dear Hammond, and all the others of that date. Timid, of course, he is, because he evidently couldn’t bear the notion of my doing anything without him. I dare say my chief difficulty will be in getting him up to the mark, and keeping him there. Well, of course I must submit ; or at any rate, appear to do so, and go on by degrees till I can get full swing. Probably, if I humour him at starting, I shall have my own way. But to be sure, there is something rather rich in my coming down here for parish-work, and to find myself only allowed to be the sexton’s deputy, and to have the charge of the church clock. Perhaps, however, it may be wanting cleaning, or regulating, or something. And one may show one’s earnestness by diligence in trifles, as well as in things of importance ; and so, the very first thing in the morning, I will go and look after the church clock.”

And with that sensible resolution, the new Curate of Cumberworth went to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

TAKING TIME BY THE FORELOCK.

"And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And looking on it with lack-lustre eye,
Says, very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock :
Thus we may see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags :
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine ;
And after one hour more 'twill be eleven.' "

As you like it.

BUT the Curate of Cumberworth soon woke. For his mind being, like Tony Lumpkins', "in a concatenation accordingly," no sooner did the Church clock proclaim the next hour, than the Reverend John Smith started up in his bed with something of the sensation of the little boy who rouses himself with the conviction that he is late for school. The clock and the duties connected with it were Mr. Smith's last waking thought, and the first sound of the clock vibrating on that mysterious nerve which connects our waking with our sleeping lucubrations—(Nota bene, I am not at all sure that any such nerve exists, but I mean this to be

very fine writing,)—the natural result followed, Mr. Smith had a strong impulse to spring up, and engage at once in the office which he was to undertake on the morrow. A hasty glance round the room, however, satisfied him that the morrow was not yet arrived. The moon was pouring her light through his window, and it was therefore not yet “time to get up.” Moreover, he felt a hazy impression creeping over him that the clock had only struck *two*. In order to verify the fact he drew forth his own watch from beneath the pillow into the moonshine, and there read upon the dial-plate, minute and hour hands pointing very evidently, not to two, but to half-past one!

“High time indeed!” thought he to himself, “that some competent person should be put in charge of the church clock. Plenty of reform wanted there, at any rate. Nothing could have happened more opportunely. I dare say the old sexton never sets the clock at all; just contents himself with winding it up. Here are people with their clock more than half an hour too fast, and knowing nothing about it! And this with a railway station in their parish! What bucolic antediluvians! Well, so much the better. It will afford me the opportunity of teaching them the value of time,—a very good subject, by the way, for one of my ser-

mons on Sunday,—and the example of regularity which I shall set, will, of course, give me authority and influence.” And thereupon Mr. Smith laid his head upon his pillow, and slept till the clock struck three, when he woke with another start. And with such alternations he counted the hours till six, when he arose, very full of energy, as usual, but not very much refreshed.

“Is this the sexton’s?” he inquired, as about eight o’clock he put his head in at the door of a cottage.

The only occupant was an elderly woman, who was eating her breakfast in a very original costume. Her head was ornamented with a nightcap deeply frilled and edged with a running of scarlet worsted. She had a jacket or short bedgown, made, not of the usual material for such articles, but of faded black and yellow brocade. A common calico gown of large conspicuous pattern, drawn partly through the pocket-hole, displayed a rather short black stuff petticoat, while a neatly turned ankle and small foot pointed carefully so as to invite the observation of the cat upon the hearth, (if puss should chance to be in a humour for admiration,) completed the remarkable effect.

“The Rector, my good lady, sent me” began the Reverend John Smith.

"The collector sent you, did he, my good sir?" answered the occupant of the cottage, interrupting him. "Then let me advise you to return to him, and tell him that though John Dibble, my brother, is out, I take it upon myself, who am his sister, to assert that the taxes are paid."

"Allow me to explain, madam. I am not the collector, but the new Curate, and the Rector, Mr. Gibson, authorized me to come and speak about the church clock."

"The new Curate! Heaven and earth! have I the felicity of seeing the new Curate? worthy Mr. Blandy's much-to-be-respected successor? Your name, sir, (we know there's nothing in a name: a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,) but still you have a name, and that name is"

"Smith. The Reverend John Smith."

"I could have sworn it, sir: there is an expression of benevolence about you, which at once betrayed the patronymic. I am not much of a grammarian, sir, but surely Smith is the preterperfect tense of smooth. There is a smith gentility, Mr. Smooth,—a smooth gentility, I should rather say, Mr. Smith, which stamps the man, and establishes the grateful fact at once that you will be a real acquisition to the inhabitants of Cumberworth. Sir, I

positively pine for your pulpit ministrations, but till that happy privilege is mine, allow me to offer you such hospitality as is in my power, and invite you to partake of breakfast."

The Reverend John Smith opened his eyes very widely, perhaps for the purpose of satisfying himself that he was not still dreaming, and began to wonder whether all the people in Cumberworth dressed so oddly, and spoke so grandiloquently.

He declined the breakfast, as having already breakfasted, and proceeded to inquire the name of the person whom he was addressing.

"Ah, sir, I can't boast of being one of the Smiths, that wide-spread, powerful, well-known family. My name—though what's in a name?—has a rough and rugged twang about it, and Heaven and earth, what an impropriety! If I haven't been talking to a gentleman all this time in my nightcap! Excuse me, sir, for finishing my toilet in your presence." And snatching a bonnet of the most original construction and arrangement of colours from a neighbouring dresser, the good lady drew it over her nightcap, at the same time grasping a dilapidated green silk parasol, curiously embroidered, or rather darned in divers places with a sort of gobble-stitch of the same scarlet worsted which adorned her frill. "My name, sir," she

continued, "is Beccles; Rebecca Beccles," (curtseying in that fashion which is called "making a cheese,") "at your service. Born Dibble; bred Rebecca, or Becky; and alas! married Beccles. Not that I have anything to complain of. Beccles was a good creature, but weak: too weak to live in a brewery; so he died and was buried; and I have kept John Dibble's house, I hope I may say with credit and respectability, ever since,—Becky Beccles, at your service."

"The name is familiar to me," observed Mr. Smith, for it occurred to him that he had lately heard it (as indeed he had, in his interview with Mr. Gibson), but where, and when, he could not remember. "The name is familiar to me."

"Not a doubt of it, sir. It has been known in the very first circles. His late Royal Highness, the gallant Duke of York, was wont to call me his Bashful Becky, and dear old 'Farmer George,' his worthy father, actually condescended to shake hands with me on the terrace at Windsor, and declared he would have me appointed Syllabub-maker in ordinary to the Queen and Princesses. That was when I lived with the Duchess of Droitwich, and basked in the beams of Royalty. Were you ever much about the Court, sir? Have you ever

basked in that pleasant but treacherous sunshine?"

"Never," answered the Curate, who found it difficult even to insert a monosyllable.

"Well, now really you astonish me: surely, sir, you are jesting. I thought that . . . indeed, I have been assured that, now-a-days the Smiths have the Court quite to themselves. At least you are one of the Chaplains in Ordinary: famous table they used to have at St. James's in old times."

"No, Mrs. Beccles, I am not," answered the Curate, hoping that in due time the inquirer would be out of breath.

"No? Then I fear you have not done yourself justice. You have kept too much in the back-ground. Now let me give you a bit of advice. Prince Albert is to open the Rypophagon, or Pantechnicon, or Poly . . ."

"Polly-put-the-kettle-on," ejaculated Mr. Smith, not quite knowing whether to laugh or to cry.

"Exactly, sir; His Royal Highness is to open the Pollyputthekettleon at Kettleby tomorrow. Take care to be there, and offer him a bouquet, or something, and you must be taken notice of. Once known, your fortune is made."

"Thank you, my good madam, I am afraid

my duties here will keep me at home; but I must come to the point with respect to which I came to speak. Mr. Gibson tells me that your brother is absent from home; but I presume that some one has access to the clock-chamber in the Church?"

"Certainly, sir, I have. Is there anything I can do to oblige you?"

"Well, Mrs. Beccles, the clock must be altered; it is thirty-four minutes too fast by London time. I have promised Mr. Gibson to see to it. May I ask who winds the clock up in your brother's absence?"

"O, I do; and very often when he is at home. Things, you know, sir, are not always pleasant at the full of the moon; the birds have such very odd flights just then, and people watch one so, especially when singing in the ears goes with it. At such times, I'm free to confess that I don't much like going to the clock, because of the bell-chamber above; for the old gentleman in drab . . ."

"The old gentleman in drab?"

"Hush! you don't know about him, honoured sir," continued Mrs. Beccles, laying her hand on the Curate's arm, and casting on him a look of mingled confidence and suspicion. "I never speak of him if I can help it, for he hears

everything one says ; at least, if, like me, you have the misfortune to be his slave. I have been his slave, sir, ever since I was a child. I went scrambling into the belfry after jackdaw's nests, and there I saw him in a dark corner, just by the big bell, with a thing like a mariner's compass in his hand. And when he saw me, he frowned and muttered some words I couldn't understand, and popped his magical instrument right under the big bell. And O ! such a clatter ensued. I was so stunned with it that my head has never felt comfortable since. Such sounds of laughter, and anger, and shrieks of pain, mingled with the din of the big bell. Mother told me then, and believed to her dying day that it was all my fancy ; only the clock striking twelve. But I knew better ; for above all that clatter, I heard the old man's voice shouting out to me that I was his slave henceforth. And so I am," she added with a shudder, "he knows everything I do and say, for there he sits within the bell ; and the bell is his organ of hearing, because,—" and her voice dropped to a whisper, "it is in direct communication with all the other bells within the circle of hieroglyphics."

Mr. Smith had no longer any doubt as to the eccentricity of the person with whom he had

to deal, and judiciously attempted the soothing system.

"Well, well, Mrs. Beccles, I am very sorry to hear that you are so tormented. We must see if nothing can be devised for your protection. Meanwhile, as it cannot but be very unpleasant to you to go into the clock-chamber, perhaps you won't object to lend me the key, so that I may regulate the clock."

"No, honoured sir; I respect you as a man, and admire you as a Curate; but a trust is a sacred thing. And, come weal, come woe, I must discharge my duty. My brother put me in charge before he went to Liverpool. 'Becky,' says he, 'there's the key; but the clock won't want winding up till I come back again; and mind, I won't have you let any of those idle, shambling lads,—no, nor any one else, into the belfry till the first chimes on Sunday morning, and then you must see the ringers in, and see them out. There was Jem Simcox came last night to try and wheedle me out of the key, 'for,' says he, 'we must ring the bells when the Prince comes to Kettleby,'—just as if the Prince's ears were long enough, worthy sir, to hear a peal six miles off. No, no; no one sets foot in the belfry till Sunday, and 'tis only Thursday morning yet."

"But Mrs. Beccles, Mr. Gibson wants . . ."

"Want is like to be his master, sir, so far as John Dibble's key is concerned. I know my duty, sir."

"Not a doubt of it, Mrs. Beccles. But if you are unwilling to trust me with the key, (and I honour you for your scrupulousness) I presume you will have no objection to using it yourself. You will, I dare say, be good enough to regulate the clock for us."

"O, honoured sir," answered Becky, with a gracious smile which made her look more eccentric than ever, "that's quite a different thing. A new aspect of affairs comes upon the carpet, as the poor dear Duchess of Droitwich was wont to say. I am too reasonable myself not to be prepared at all times to listen to reason. My worthy Rector Mr. Gibson wishes me to regulate the clock; a natural wish, perhaps, on his part, but the conclusive argument in favour of it has not yet reached me. Why should the clock be regulated?"

"Because, my good madam, it is half an hour too fast."

"But consider, honoured sir, to make such a change as that will throw the whole parish out of their reckonings. Suppose I put the clock back,—say ten minutes to-day, and ten minutes on Monday."

"Why should the clock tell lies, Mrs. Bec-

cles? A clock's business is to tell the true time. No, no, never make two bites of a cherry! Better correct the error at once."

"Folks won't be pleased, sir; I know they won't."

"O, Mrs. Beccles, you know that I belong to a profession which above all others should be indifferent to such a motive as the fear of man. Say, that there is a little grumbling, at any rate people will see that I have some decision of character, and that, so as I do my duty, I am indifferent to consequences."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Beccles, with a soundness of judgment that would have done credit to a saner person, "I shouldn't like if I were you, to go out of my way to give offence at first starting. We don't know you yet, sir, and will it be well to create a prejudice against you?"

"I am not afraid of the results, Mrs. Beccles."

"And it is not my business to bandy words with you," was the reply. And thereupon Mrs. Beccles fetched the key, proceeded towards the Church accompanied by Mr. Smith, who was determined to see with his own eyes that the proper change was made.

He waited till he was satisfied, and then proceeded homewards.

Becky Beccles watched him from a narrow slit in the turret which she was descending, and then with a chuckle ejaculated, "Well, my brave gentleman, I'm very much mistaken if you haven't gone and put your foot in it, as the saying is. But that's your affair, not mine. Wilful folks must have their own way!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARSON IN CIRCUIT.

"For look you, you know not which way you shall go."

Cymbeline.

WHEN the Reverend John Smith turned his back on the churchyard, which, however, he did not do till he had made an examination of the sacred edifice and its precincts, including a rapid survey of the names in the Prayer Books on the seats, and the inscriptions on the headstones; till he had counted sixteen cobwebs in the roof, and taken a note of seven cracked quarries in the windows of the north aisle; till he had satisfied himself that on the previous Sunday some schoolchild had cracked and eaten at least half-a-dozen nuts; till he had determined on discovering James Liptrot, and expostulating with him on the impropriety of having drawn a gallows with a sufferer dependent therefrom, and a superscription "This is Jack Webster," on the fly-leaf of his hymn-

book ; till he had ascertained that the parish surplice was by no means free from ironmould, and that a dirty duster had been left under the clerk's seat ; not till Mr. Smith had made himself acquainted with these several details, had built up his inferences therefrom as to the state of the parish, social, ecclesiastical, and religious, and had determined on the course which he should pursue for the reformation of evil and development of good (a labour which occupied that worthy man a full quarter of an hour) ; not till then did Mr. Smith set out on the voyage of discovery to which he had long since determined to devote his first day at Cumberworth.

Mr. Smith did not much like the notion of looking at his new flock through Mr. Gibson's spectacles. He wished to make his own observations and judge for himself. And he was quite right. Grant, that he would have a little dust thrown in his eyes, and be imposed upon here and there with one of those one-sided statements which are by no means peculiar to cottages, still he would have the great advantage of starting without a prejudice in favour of or against any one of his flock. Better to find out for himself that Molly Medley was a sad gossip, and that Joe Philpott spent most of his time at the public-house. The discovery, whenever

it dawned upon him, would give a freshness and a cogency to his reproofs, which would scarcely be found if their characters came to him second-hand.

So without putting himself in opposition to good Mr. Gibson, or making a methodical progress from house to house, Mr. Smith set forth to look about him.

Most people would have made some little previous inquiry as to the direction of the roads, and the position of the various parts of the parish. Not so Mr. Smith. He set out with the conviction that it would be rather an advantage than otherwise to lose his way: roads and paths, gates and stiles, would be all the more vividly impressed on his memory, and the necessity of making his way out of a difficulty by inquiry would, at once, bring him in contact, and make him personally acquainted with, at least some of his parishioners.

It is true that there were some inconveniences connected with this independent course of proceeding which had not suggested themselves, and with which, before the day was over, he had become acquainted: but even thus, he was buying his experience, and the sooner experience is bought the better.

The parish of Cumberworth is agricultural, consisting chiefly of a few clusters of cottages,

dotted about here and there, some large dairy farms, and the Squire's residence, Cumberworth Court, at present occupied by Sir Tukesbury Twigge, a wealthy gentleman who had been raised to the honours of a baronetcy as a reward for having acquired a large fortune by the sale of ready-made clothing.

But of this Mr. Smith, as yet, knew little, though as the day advanced, he grew more enlightened as to the topography of Cumberworth. Its population was obviously in the harvest-fields, and therefore he made no explorations among the cottages, where closed doors, and a linen blind or curtain drawn across the windows, gave evidence universally of the absence of their tenants. At first Mr. Smith confined his investigations to the roads and lanes, which seemed to be wonderfully alike, intersecting each other continually, and to be bounded on either side by high hedges, which cut off all view of the bearings of the surrounding country so successfully, that our hero contrived to indulge in a circuit of six or eight miles, without being at any time half a mile distant from the point from which he had started. And it was high noon before he had satisfied himself that instead of making progress, he had been going round and round, like a squirrel in a cage, through a labyrinth of entangled lanes, and

that he knew no more of the character of the country than he did at first starting.

So, rather bewildered, he got out of the lanes by following a team into a field of barley, from which field, however, there was no outlet, and from whence, having been previously well stared at by the gleaners (who, having made bold to ask him what o'clock it was, proceeded, not altogether inaudibly, to criticize his appearance, and to wonder who he was, and what brought him there), he in course of time retreated.

His next experiment, however, led to more important results. A wicket-gate opening into a lane attracted his attention as affording him a better chance of getting upon a more frequented route. Upon opening it, he found himself on a gravelled path close to a hedge side, and separated from the field by a long line of posts and rails. The field which the path skirted was extensive; pasture land on the slope of a hill which fell rapidly towards a brook, over which, at no great distance, was a foot-bridge, connecting the path, apparently, with a plantation on the opposite side: beyond the plantation appeared some chimney-tops, which gave evidence of dwellings in the neighbourhood. It was a beautiful view which lay extended before him, and Mr. Smith, bounding

over the rails, seated himself on the grass, bright with the flowers which adorn our pastures, the scabious, and the hawkweeds, and a score or two more of such living jewels.

Whether Mr. Smith had sat down for the purpose of resting himself, or of botanizing, or of enjoying the prospect of wood and water, fat meadows and distant hills, is more than I can say, for his session was interrupted by the sound of the church clock, which spoke for itself after this fashion :

“One : two : ting, tang : ting, tang.”

“Half-past two o'clock ! is it possible ?” ejaculated Mr. Smith, starting on his feet with surprise ; for he had looked at his watch about a quarter of an hour before, and then it wanted just twenty-one minutes to two. “Is it possible ? What a wretched affair that church clock at Cumberworth must be. It was set with my watch some five hours ago, and now there is from thirty to five-and-thirty minutes’ difference between them. For my part I can’t think how people can exist without a good clock ; and really these Cumberworth folks seem to know no more of the passage of time than those cows do. What a lot of them there are ; ‘forty feeding like one,’ as Wordsworth says. I wonder what sort of cheeses they make hereabouts. It ought to be good from such land as

this. By the way, I wonder what I shall do with the dairy-women. I suppose there is not such a hopeless, ill-conditioned, ignorant set of creatures in England as the dairy-women. Never at church, never able to be got hold of for instruction, they are hardly above the brutes among whom they spend their lives. What work it must be milking such quantities of cows! why there are ten, and four make fourteen, and eight, that is twenty-two, and down by the water-side two more,—four and twenty cows in this field only. And poor things! how the flies seem teasing them. What comical capers they are cutting. Hullo! why they really seem as if they meant to charge *me*! It is very well they are not bulls, for some of them look uncommonly wild and savage! I declare I don't half like them. I've heard of running cows, but I suppose if there is not a bull among them they are not likely to be dangerous. Upon my word I believe I had better get out of their way."

Sooner said than done, Mr. Smith! There they are, the whole herd, tearing up and down the hill side with their heads down and their tails erect in the air, looking as full of mischievous intent as can be. Every now and then they come to a full stop, Mr. Smith, and look at you, and then tossing their heads wildly from

side to side, off they set again, whirling round and round you, and always in a still narrower circle.

For pity's sake, Mr. Smith, get back to the path, and interpose the rails between you and your assailants. For you may depend upon it that it is no joke to have a herd of cows for your antagonists. They may neither gore you nor toss you, (though I won't insure you against either misfortune,) but they will charge you full tilt, Mr. Smith; and having upset you, the whole herd will gallop over you, and trample on you, and come and smell how you like it, and then trample on you again, till you have got comminuted fractures of all your ribs, Mr. Smith, and there is no more wind in your body than there is in a broken bellows.

Oh, Mr. Smith! what infatuation could lead you to do that? The temptation of a short cut to the bridge? I thought you had been a better general. Don't you see that you have cut off your own retreat? The cows have got between you and the rails, and will charge you down the hill. It is now a trial of speed: you are running for your life. The advantages of a short cut may be bought too dearly. Your present experience on the subject will last you the remainder of your life; but the question is how long you have got to live? That

old beldame with a crumpled horn is determined to poke holes in your integuments, if she can catch you. Run, run! Never mind the ditch, Mr. Smith. Well done, neck or nothing! Run, run! that wicked crumpled-horn is within a yard of you! Ah! what is to become of you? You *have* reached the bridge; but the bridge is private property, and the owner has set a door, girt about with a kind of fan of pointed stakes on its summit and its sides, which makes further progress impossible. There is nothing for you but to dash into the river, (of whose depth you know nothing, and you cannot swim,) or, with such strength as is left you, to tear down some portion of the chevaux-de-frise that opposes your admission to the bridge.

Heaven send that the wood-work may be rotten!

Ay, and rotten it is, or desperation makes you vigorous. Down it all comes; chevaux-de-frise, door-posts, door, and ever so much of the wooden parapet, with a rush and a crash that makes crumpled-horn stop in mid career, and then wheel about, and leave you in safety, Mr. Smith.

Yes, but you have torn your coat, and you are splashed up to your ears with the black mud from the ditch, and you have hardly more

breath left in your body than you would have had if your regions thoracic and intercostal had been made the sport of crumpled-horn's hoofs. But, wonderful to relate, breathless and dilapidated as you are, your attention is riveted by the sound of a stable-clock, somewhere close at hand, corroborating that profligate announcement which issued from the Cumberworth tower as you sat upon the bank before your misfortunes commenced.

“One: two: ting-tang: ting-tang!”

Half-past two o'clock, then, down in the valley here, as well as up above! How very extraordinary! You withdraw your watch from your pocket, Mr. Smith, to verify the fact, and O! of what a misfortune are you then cognizant! In your desperate struggles with the woodwork of the bridge, or in scrambling out of crumpled-horn's reach, you have pressed so hard against a projection of some kind, that a great dent has been made upon one side of your watch; that watch, which is the comfort of your life,—the instrument that rules the destinies of yourself, and which is the terror of your acquaintance; that watch, which was the gift of your honoured godfather, the acknowledged and venerated head of the Smith family,—the late Mr. Smyth Smythe Smith, of Smithfield in London, and of Smithwick

Castle, and the Smythies in the county of Chester.

Put it to your ear, my good friend, put it to your ear, and bless your stars that, in spite of all the misfortunes which seemed inevitable, your watch goes,—and so do the cows!

CHAPTER VII.

A TRESPASSER.

"Against my will, I am sent to bid you come in to dinner."

Much ado about nothing.

"AND that puts me in mind, Sir Tukesbury, to tell you that Mr. Gibson's new Curate is arrived. I suppose you will leave a card on him the first time you go into the village. He lodges at Miss Finch's."

"Well, Lady Twigge, I must see about it. Do you know anything about him?"

"Only what I have learned from Mrs. Gibson, who says that he is very able, and has been highly recommended."

"All Curates are highly recommended, my dear. The last employer is always sure to give his Curate the highest possible character, in order to get him off his hands."

"Ha, ha, ha! Very good, Sir Tukesbury; very good indeed! I shall tell that to the General," cried Mrs. Podlington, the morning visitor who was being escorted through the

gardens and pleasure-grounds of Cumberworth Court. "But do you really call upon your Curate? The General always classes Curates with the lawyer's clerk, and the doctor's young man. You don't mean that you admit them to your table?"

Sir Tukesbury coloured up. He was a jolly-looking, good-natured man, not very particular as to whom he invited to his table, provided that he could sufficiently imbue them with convictions of his wealth and grandeur: but his weak point was that he was ashamed of his own origin, and affected to ignore the very thing which he might well remember with honest pride: how by great industry and integrity he had risen from small beginnings. He was uneducated, full of prejudices, and somewhat dictatorial and positive, but a kind-hearted man at bottom. Only, a victim to false shame, and very sensitive on the subject of his rank.

Therefore, it was not without some hesitation that he admitted that he had occasionally asked Mr. Blandy, the late Curate, to dinner; "but then," he added, "Mr. Blandy was one of those modest unassuming men, who never step out of their place, or presume upon any civility that may be shown them."

"Of course, Sir Tukesbury, that makes a difference, but neither the General nor I have any

taste for clerical society. One never knows what to do with such people. They are not suited to the company with whom I suppose that one ought to associate them. They are either shy, and like wild beasts; or else so cool and full of assurance as to be quite a nuisance,—taking upon themselves to argue and criticise, and have opinions, and lay down the law, and all that,—which you know, Lady Twigge, is very offensive and improper; indeed shocking and foolish to the last degree.”

“Well, we never met with anything of that kind, I must say, either in Mr. Gibson or Mr. Blandy,” was Lady Twigge’s reply.

“No?” asked Mrs. Podlington incredulously. “Then you must be much more fortunate than we are. Such a man as that Mr. Sprott, who was inflicted on us last year, and Mr. Bleasy who preceded; shocking and offensive beyond measure, I do assure you; creaking shoes, and straight, sandy hair, both of them. And what we may have next I dread to think, for though I seldom go to Church in the morning, the afternoon service is too long to be endurable under the infliction of a second-rate Curate. I hear that our Vicar at Kettleby is looking out for another assistant. Well, I hope he will be tolerable, when found; but to be sure, be he what he may, he can’t possibly be worse

than the Vicar himself. Which is, in fact, a great comfort. Depend upon it, however, Sir Tukesbury, Curates are a horrible invention; and they are certain to get worse and worse. It was only the other day that the General told me that he had been invited to join a Society to enable Clergymen to provide Curates *for nothing*. A useful institution," observed Mrs. Podlington, with a sharp little giggle, "and pretty specimens, I should think, it will turn out. But by the way, talking of specimens, I do hope that you won't omit to show me your river-garden. I have heard so very much of it; quite a little Chatsworth, they say."

"No, no," replied Sir Tukesbury, "not that; we have only availed ourselves of our neighbour the river. The shape of the ground is pretty, and that fellow Claxton,—horribly expensive as he is,—has a wonderful taste, and makes an admirable landscape gardener."

"All the world knows, that expense is not a matter of consideration to you, Sir Tukesbury," observed Mrs. Podlington with a smile so bland, that it insured her a cartload of aquatics for her own pond. "Nobody can command such gardeners and gardens as you. Is this the way? I see the river winding like a thread of silver, through that break in the trees. O, Lady Twigge, what happy people must you and

Sir Tukesbury be! You live in a perfect Elysium."

"Not quite that, Mrs. Podlington," observed the baronet modestly, "but it has the charm of tranquillity and seclusion; we are never intruded on; none of the trespassers about that are such a take off from show places; no scampish-looking fellows breaking down one's fences, or peeping over walls to get a glimpse at whatever may chance to be within. In the garden itself there is little to be seen,—nothing to boast of. Its chief pleasure to Lady Twigge and myself consists in its perfect quiet; our privacy is never interrupted; and if so disposed, we might sit for hours in the pavilion, and hear no sound but the ripple of the water, and the lowing of the distant herd."

"How sweet! how poetical!" exclaimed Mrs. Podlington, "and this dark alley of over-arching boughs which now so completely shuts out the view," continued she, daintily picking her way through a somewhat dark and choky shrubbery,—“this darkness visible, ends no doubt abruptly in a full view of the . . . Bless my soul! Sir Tukesbury! didn't I hear a bull?"

"Only the cows in the opposite field."

"Cows, Sir Tukesbury! there is nothing upon earth that I am so afraid of, unless it be a flock of geese, hissing, and stretching out their long

necks at me ; and that is perfectly terrific. O dear Lady Twigge, it is shocking and sad to be such a coward, but please don't let us go where there are cattle."

"The river is interposed between us and them."

"Ah ! but perhaps they can ford it, or swim it, or something ! Listen. Ah"—(with a prolonged squeal) "there must be a dozen bulls at least, close at hand, and all of them wild, mad, goring monsters. Do let us turn back."

As she spoke the angry lowing was followed by a loud crash of falling timber, and a splash in the water. It is unnecessary to say that Mrs. Podlington was a good screamer, and as ladies with that agreeable propensity are not apt to be slack in exhibiting it, she forthwith commenced a course of shrieks,—interlarded with exclamations sacred and profane,—which might well have caused Crumpled-horn herself to pause and grow circumspect ere she proceeded further.

"O, Lady Twigge," she ejaculated, "the bulls are crossing the river, I know they are ! Couldn't we climb a tree?" and she rushed towards a clean-stemmed beech, apparently with the intention of swarming it, for the lowest branch was at least a dozen feet from the ground.

Meanwhile, Sir Tukesbury, hurrying forward to see what had happened, came full upon the breathless and excited Curate of Cumberworth.

Mr. Smith was not looking his best ; he had lost his hat ; he had a rent from a treacherous nail both in his trowsers and his coat : he was spotted with black mud, and in climbing the bridge he had carried off from the rotten timbers good store of cobwebs, and of that green powdery lichen which abounds in such localities.

Sir Tukesbury was a magistrate, and therefore, perhaps, there was nothing very unnatural in the supposition which arose in his mind when he got his first glimpse of Mr. Smith, that he saw before him a culprit who had escaped from the constable, as he was about to be brought down to Cumberworth Court "for justice."

"And pray, sir, who are you?" shouted the baronet.

For the moment Mr. Smith was too much out of breath to answer ; but the old line about Scylla and Charybdis rose into his mind, as he felt that he had escaped the cows only to fall foul of a middle-aged gentleman who was already in a towering passion.

"Who are you, sir, I ask? And what do you do here? And what do you mean, sir, by trespassing on my private grounds? and damaging my property? and terrifying the ladies

of my family? Don't you know, sir, that there is no thoroughfare? Didn't the locked gate at the bridgefoot tell you so? I ask you, sir, what you are doing here?"

"I am exceedingly sorry to have intruded, but I have been chased by a herd of cows; I really believe that I was running for my life. There was no other way of escape, sir, else I should not have been guilty of such an impropriety."

"No other way of escape? You had no business in the field at all, and if you were there, and had kept to the path within the rails, the cattle would have done you no harm. You don't come here, sir, I can tell you. You will please to return the way you came."

"Certainly, sir, I should be glad to do so; but you would hardly wish me to face a herd of running cows; perhaps you would allow the person who has charge of them to accompany me, or permit me to wait where I am till milking time."

"Indeed, sir, I shall do nothing of the kind; you will just go back by the way you came; you have only to keep within the rails, and the cattle can't reach you."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but though the posts are standing, there are no rails for a hundred yards or more, near the bridge. Could

I have sheltered myself behind the rails, I should not have intruded on you."

"Eh! what? are the rails down? Ah, so they are. I remember I told Stephens to replace some that were rotten. He ought not to have taken down the old ones without immediately substituting new ones, for some of the cows, especially that black and white one, are rather wild; but you had no business here at all, sir. There is no road hereabouts. You could have been after no good."

"I am a stranger, and have lost my way."

"A stranger, where do you come from?"

"Cumberworth, sir," was the reply.

"Cumberworth! why I know everybody at Cumberworth; and I never saw you before."

"I have only been a resident there for four and twenty hours."

"What's your name?"

"Smith, sir."

"Smith! Everybody who gets into trouble, and who is found where he has no business to be, calls himself Smith. If I've committed one, I suppose I've committed a score or two of Smiths to Kettleby Gaol in the course of the last year or two. All the vagrants in the country appear to me to belong to the family of Smith."

A flush passed over Mr. Smith's face as this

insulting address was made to him, but he remained perfectly silent.

And the baronet was silent, either because he was out of breath, or had nothing more to say, or because his conscience was beginning to give him little tweaks. If he had had a little fuel for his rage, he would have got on to his own satisfaction: but there was nothing left to be in a passion about; and the longer he was silent, the more awkward did the silence seem to grow.

Mr. Smith was a gentleman,—a thorough gentleman both by birth and by education. And far more than that, he was a *Christian* gentleman,—a gentleman upon Christian principle; one, that is, who is ready to bear and forbear; who avoids offence; is slow to take it; and, if he causes it, is ready at once to make atonement for it. Like everybody else, he had his little foibles and infirmities; he was young, and very inexperienced, but whatever might be the difficulties to which he was exposed, or which he created for himself, he was never wanting in “conduct;” his habits, his feelings, his instincts would, at all times insure his acting and speaking, “like a gentleman,” as he was.

The baronet looked at the Curate, as if resolved to read him through and through. The

Curate met the gaze unflinchingly, and returned it so steadily that the baronet quailed beneath it, and at last said, "You inform me that you are a stranger ; but you have not told me what you are."

"You did not inquire, but I meant to inform you, sir, as soon as you gave me the opportunity, that I am a Clergyman,—Curate to Mr. Gibson of Cumberworth. If a card be any evidence to the fact, here is mine."

"'Reverend John Smith, Cumberworth.' Whew !" exclaimed Sir Tukesbury, "why the . . . I mean, my good sir, wherefore did you not say so at once?"

"There was nothing to make it needful, sir, that I should give the explanation, unless you required it. That I was a stranger who had been careless enough to lose my way, was a sufficient reason for seeking to be put right, but none for introducing myself to you. The intrusion upon your grounds was involuntary ; but having intruded, the least I could do would be to withdraw as speedily and inoffensively as possible. I trust you will allow me to replace any mischief I have done, and that you will accept on your own part, and convey to any members of the family whom I understood you to say that I have alarmed, the expression of my apologies and regrets. May I beg of you

now, to put me on the shortest road homewards."

"Well, sir, you speak very much like a gentleman," said Sir Tukesbury, "and I am glad to make your acquaintance, and shall be happy to present you to my wife, Lady Twigge. Kitty my dear, this gentleman is the Curate of Cumberworth, who having lost his way, has been chased by some of our cows."

Lady Twigge advanced graciously. Mrs. Podlington hung back daintily and superciliously, as though there was some danger that having escaped goring by a mad bull, she might still be tossed by a wild curate. "Won't you come into the house, sir?" asked Lady Twigge. "Sir Tukesbury, Mr. Smith appears to have lost his hat; you had better send one of the men after it. Perhaps also, you would like us to send up to your residence for another coat; the one you have on is sadly torn."

"It is the only coat I have got at Cumberworth," answered the Curate simply.

Mrs. Podlington shrugged her shoulders, and cast an expressive look at Sir Tukesbury, who winced. His new acquaintance was a man with but one coat. The invitation to dinner, which hung on his tongue, was swallowed.

But Lady Twigge had no false shame of that kind.

"My dear," she said, addressing her husband, "is not that the stable clock striking three? Mr. Smith, Sir Tukesbury and I are going to dine at a very unfashionable hour to-day, for we are going to Kettleby, to see the preparations for to-morrow, which will hardly be completed before dusk. And as we may be detained there some time, we have ordered dinner at four. If that is not too early an hour for you, and you don't mind joining a *tête-à-tête*, will you give us the pleasure of your company?"

Mr. Smith answered,—truly enough, that he was not fit to be seen, and that he should be much happier if allowed to go home.

"Well, I suppose we shall meet at Kettleby to-morrow. Have you a ticket?" inquired Sir Tukesbury.

"No, sir, I have not," replied Mr. Smith.

"If there is one to be had, I dare say they will let me have it, and I will send it up to you this evening, if I can obtain one."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you, Sir Tukesbury; but I fear I cannot afford the time. I have so much to do just at present."

"O for that matter, Mr. Smith," said Lady Twigge, "all your parishioners will be at Kettleby. Not a soul that can get to the sight will be left at Cumberworth."

Mr. Smith shook his head. "What time," he inquired, "does the business of the day begin?"

"Why these great folks are early. The procession is to leave the Kettleby Station at noon, and they expect to reach the new building half an hour after. I suppose it will be a very punctual affair, so that if you go you must be there to your time. No carriage is to be allowed to enter the High Street after eleven o'clock, and there will be no admission into the building after half-past eleven."

"I am sure that I must stay at home," said Mr. Smith, "but if punctuality is so necessary, will you allow me to ask whether they go by London time at Kettleby, Sir Tukesbury?"

"Undoubtedly they do; but why?"

"Only, under those circumstances, I would take the liberty of mentioning that I set my watch, which is as good as a chronometer; at Euston Square yesterday, and that there is half an hour's difference at least, between Cumberworth time and London time."

"Ah," said the baronet, "our stable clock is by no means perfect, and my groom told me this morning, that if the Church clock was right, we were half an hour wrong. I desired him to make the alteration, and I suppose he has, for the two clocks struck three within a minute or two of each other."

"I am afraid then that both the clocks have gained a great deal since this morning," remarked Mr. Smith.

"May not your own watch have lost?" inquired Sir Tukesbury.

"O, no," was the reply, "I can answer for that. My watch is a perfect goer. I am one of those people who 'go by clock-work,' as the saying is. I am very particular about my watch."

"Well, sir," said Sir Tukesbury, seeing the Curate impatient to be gone, "since I must not press you to stay dinner to-day, and since you won't join in the grand doings to-morrow, will you come and dine with us afterwards, and we will tell you all about them?"

It was said resolutely, in spite of Mrs. Podlington; and so good humouredly, that Mr. Smith felt that he ought to accept the invitation cordially. And he did so.

CHAPTER VIII.

LISTENERS HEAR NO GOOD OF THEMSELVES.

"Let him be flayed alive : then 'nointed over with honey ; set on the head of a wasp's nest ; then stand, till he be three quarters and a dram dead ; then recovered again with aqua-vitæ, or some other hot infusion ; then, raw as he is, and in the hottest day prognostication proclaims, shall he be set against a brick wall, the sun looking with a southward eye upon him, where he is to behold him with flies blown to death."

Winter's Tale.

It was not a small amount of work which would weary the Reverend John Smith, and of parochial work, properly so called, the worthy Curate had had little enough on the first day of his residence at Cumberworth ; but in order that the energetic-minded men of future generations may not be disheartened and downcast by occasional sensations of weariness, my truthful pen records that by the time he got home to his lodging, he was quite entirely done up.

The losing his way perpetually throughout the course of a long summer's day, amid a network of dull lanes, had less excitement about it

than he had expected to find in it, and the knowledge of the country which he had expected to derive therefrom, was of the smallest possible kind. There was nothing to distinguish one hedge from another, there were neither mile-stones nor finger-posts, and their convolutions and branchings off were perpetual. How many weary miles he had plodded, round and round, I cannot tell,—quite enough, however, to tire most people ; but it was the cow-race, with Sir Tukesbury Twigge at its termination, which fairly finished him, and when he presented himself before Mrs. Finch with his mud-stained clothes, torn coat, and drawn and haggard features, it was all that that plain-spoken lady could do, not to bless her stars, and tell him that he looked more like a tramp than a gentleman, and that Mr. Blandy in all the years he had lived with her, had never come home in such a pickle as that !

But Mrs. Finch, too, had an energetic mind, had high notions of the advantages of Spartan discipline, and thought it “due to herself,” (that convenient phrase which really means that somebody has set his or her mind upon being specially and rampageously disagreeable) to establish her character with the new Curate as a strict martinet.

Poor man, when he threw himself down upon

the horsehair horror, which his landlady looked upon as luxurious enough for the repose of a queen, he did so because he felt that he could not have stood for five minutes longer, had he been actually in the Royal Presence. And when he asked for tea, it was because his throat was so dry, that it was pain to him to speak.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you said you would drink tea at seven. I have been always used to regular hours in this house. My late lodger Mr. Blandy, never kept me waiting a minute, and I believe I may say that I was no less true to his time. There is no water boiling; and there is butter to be got from the shop; the tea cannot be ready before seven, sir. It is not much past six now." Mr. Smith looked at his watch appealingly.

"I know what o'clock it is, sir," observed Mrs. Finch shortly. "My timepiece was bequeathed me by the late Mrs. Crakanthorpe, and never wants altering or regulating. I always go by my own clock, sir."

Apparently Mrs. Hannah had ascertained the nature of the duties which had devolved on her lodger, and had no intention that *her* clock should be submitted to his jurisdiction. The kitchen was evidently to be no part of his diocese.

" Might I beg for a crust of bread and a glass of water, Mrs. Finch ?"

" You'll excuse me, Mr. Smith, but you are much too warm to drink cold water. I have heard the late Mrs. Crakanthorpe say, that she once saw a gentleman drop down dead in a ball room, through drinking iced lemonade just after he had been accepted by a young lady of fashion and fifteen hundred a year, and that she fainted away, and went mad then and there, and lived happy, poor thing! in a lunatic asylum ever afterwards. By which awful event it may be clearly seen that nothing is so dangerous and detrimental as having anything to do with cold water if you can possibly avoid it. You'll excuse me, sir, if I seem taking upon myself to advise you, but you are very young, sir, and are, no doubt, glad of suggestions from persons of experience."

Mr. Smith was by no means inclined to dwell much on his own youth and inexperience, believing himself equal to the work of advising the world around him; which, indeed, was his vocation; and he might, under ordinary circumstances, have been disposed to assert his prerogative; but he was too weary to talk, and could only vent a sigh and wish for his tea, when the obdurate Finch turned on her heel and departed.

But no sooner had she left the room, than it occurred to him that the settee which was adding discomfort to his tire had, when he left home, been occupied by his books; he had stacked them there himself; and now they were all upon the floor,—tidily arranged, indeed, but—on the floor.

“Come, come, this will never do! A joke is all very well, but if this good lady thinks that she is going to ride rough-shod over me, I must just show her the difference. I am not going to have my books upon the floor I can tell her! I saw she had no inclination for book-shelves. I wonder how the dear departed Blandy managed; had nothing, I suppose, but a Concordance, and an odd volume or two of Blair’s sermons. No. I am ready to sleep on the floor myself, if need be; but to such treatment of my books, I shall not submit. I suppose I shall have a battle with the old dragon, and I wish I had had my tea first; but never mind, here goes!”

And in the excitement, or the fun of the contemplated struggle, (for Mr. Smith loved the one, and had plenty of the other in him, as who has not, that has any originality or force of character?) the weary Curate set himself to work, and when, as the kitchen clock struck seven, and Mrs. Finch entered with the tea-

kettle, the books were safely reposing in the settee.

Mrs. Finch would have had great pleasure at that moment, in pouring a stream from the tea-kettle on her lodger's legs; but she forbore, and clearing her throat, assumed her stateliest tone. "You'll excuse me, sir, but I can't have that load of books on my settee. I've a great regard, sir, for that piece of furniture. It was the solace of Mrs. Crakanthorpe's declining years, and has lost a castor, and one leg was broke in addition."

"Poor lady!" observed Mr. Smith calmly, "a fractured limb must, at her time of life, have been a great addition to her trials."

"I am alluding to the furniture, sir."

"O, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Finch."

"And I wished to observe, that on the settee those books cannot be."

"And I wish to observe, that on the floor my books shall not be."

"Sir!"

"Madam!"

"You forget, sir, that this is my house."

"O, no, indeed, I don't, Mrs. Finch. I shall never have the opportunity of forgetting that."

"Then, sir, it is better that we should come to an understanding about things at once. You'll excuse me, sir . . ."

"No, Mrs. Finch. You must excuse me. I am dreadfully hungry, and I can understand nothing till I've had my tea. The salt-cellar, if you please, ma'am. And I should like a fresh egg, if you've got one." Mr. Smith spoke with his mouth full, which was very unmannerly of him; but there was a decision in his tone, which made Mrs. Hannah start, and obey orders as readily as if the lamented Crakanthorpe herself had issued them. Nay, in her surprise, she very nearly cried. "So unlike dear good Mr. Blandy! Ah! he was a real gentleman!"

However, by the time that the bell rang for the removal of the tea, Mrs. Finch had got herself up to fever heat, and she was so used to victory, that a defeat seemed impossible. "I shall just show him who is to be master," quoth she to herself, "and then it will be easy and comfortable for the time to come."

Alas, the very same thought was swelling itself out through the length and breadth of her lodger's mind.

"When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war."

Mrs. Finch had intended to commence the attack; but no sooner was her head within the doorway, than Mr. Smith, who had renewed his youth with a previous onslaught upon the bread and butter, at once invited the contest.

"Now, Mrs. Finch, let us settle about the books."

"Well, sir, I can't have my settee broken."

"And I can't have my books ruined. So far we are both agreed, Mrs. Finch. I propose therefore, to hire some book-shelves."

"I don't see where they are to stand, sir."

"Between the windows, Mrs. Finch."

"And what is to become of that elegant picture of Mrs. Crakanthorpe's father?"

"That thing? You don't mean that you really value it? Well, well, you can take it down, and hang it in your own bedroom, Mrs. Finch; only for goodness' sake put it out of sight; for the sourness of that cantankerous old curmudgeon's face is enough to make you quite ill-tempered, Mrs. Finch."

O, woman, woman! when will you ever be proof against a compliment implied? Flattery direct you will resist, but the compliment by implication falls on your ear so truthfully, and coincides so thoroughly with your own opinion of your own merits, that it gratifies you in spite of your teeth, as the saying is.

"But you don't consider my carpet, sir."

"On the contrary, Mrs. Finch, that is the very thing that I have been considering. If my books were stacked on the floor, your carpet would be ruined. I am very sorry to see

that you are troubled with the clothes-moth, Mrs. Finch : a very destructive insect, I can assure you ; and one that would be sure to harbour in an undisturbed carpet. Lay a load of books on the floor, and the carpet on which they are lying will be eaten through and through in a month's time."

"Do you really think so, sir?"

"I am positive of it."

"Well, sir, there was a feather tippet of Mrs. Crakanthorpe's that had some moths in it, I know, and I believe I hung it up in this room after Mr. Blandy left. But I presume you won't expect me to cut the carpet away to make a place for the bookcase?"

"O dear no. I wish you to please yourself. Thank you, Mrs. Finch ; you see there is no difficulty. I shall order a bookcase to-morrow. Good-night."

Mrs. Finch was so unaccustomed to have the law laid down for her own guidance, that she had literally nothing to say to her voluble and resolute antagonist. And even when she had slept upon the matter, she made no further difficulties.

It was now that Friday so memorable in the annals of Kettleby, when His Royal Highness was to open the Pantechnicon, and when he

did open it with an appropriate speech about gas, guano, the liberty of the press, and vulcanized India-rubber; concluding with a magnificent eulogy on King William the Third. There was a grand procession from the railway station, and no less than four triumphal arches, and banners of pink and blue calico, and a troop of yeomanry; and a brass band, and everything that was proper for such an occasion.

But our hero saw none of the great doings. He woke so stiff and weary that he was more disposed to indoors occupation than to another long walk. Besides he had a sermon to write, and two or three of his friends at a distance would be wanting to know how he was getting on, and to what extent his new broom had been sweeping clean the parish of Cumberworth; so the afternoon was far advanced before he had completed the tasks which he had allotted himself.

Once or twice Mrs. Finch looked in upon him, and suggested that Sir Tukesbury Twigge always dined at six o'clock; that it was half an hour's walk to Cumberworth Court; that she presumed he knew what o'clock it was.

Mr. Smith thanked her, nodded, smiled affably, and pointed to his watch which lay open before him. "When you know me better, Mrs. Finch, you will not think it necessary to look

me up. You will find that I am the most regular and systematic of men. A time for all things, and all things at their proper time. That is my motto; for if work is to be got through, there is only one way in which it can be done as it ought to be done. I am not the less obliged to you, however, Mrs. Finch."

And he read on till the hand of his watch reached its appointed minute, and then he dressed himself, and started once more on his travels.

He had proceeded some way along the high road before it occurred to him that it was more than usually thronged, and the cause suggested itself. His thoughts, worthy man, had been so full of Cumberworth, and schemes of usefulness therewith connected that all recollection of the grand doings at Kettleby had passed from his mind.

But as gig, and cart, and van, and successive groups of foot passengers met him, he caught an occasional word or two which told him where they had been, and then he commenced a course of closer observation, which was rendered all the easier from the fact that no conversation was interrupted by his approach. Nobody knew him personally, and nobody was thinking about the new curate, or at any rate, not of him as being that individual.

He had not gone far, however, in his study of his future neighbours, before he came to the conclusion that he had never seen such a sour, discontented-looking race. Every fresh face appeared more ill-humoured than the last. Men, women, and children were, to use the old expression, "as cross as the tongs." Men stalked alone, leaving their wives twenty yards behind: mothers scolded their children for loitering: children were quarrelling among themselves. Even among the lads and lasses in their Sunday best, there was none of merry laughing and bantering which such company usually produces. They seemed all tired, all dissatisfied, all ready to take offence. Cumberworth was in a fit of the sulks.

"Such a shame to lose a day's work, and then to be choused out of everything after all! I know I seed nothing but a parcel of boughs, and bits of flags, not a bit better than we have at our own Club-Feast. Did you see the Prince, Bill?"

"See un? How's a body to see through stone walls? They was all in the grand new building afore I got there: and when they left it they just got into a carriage that drove like mad to the station. I wonder they killed nobody. I heerd as they druv right over a pig at Catchem's corner."

“Well! rat me if ever I knew such a humbugging concern in all my life. I know I expected to see the Prince all in red and gold, like my lord judge at ‘sizes, only bigger and grander, with a fine crown on his head, or leastwise the Prince of Wales’s feathers, as they call them; and that he’d come among us, and say ‘Well, my fine fellows, I’m proud to make your acquaintance,’ or summat like that’n. And that then, may be, he’d put his hand into his breeches pocket, and bring up a handful of sovereigns, which he would throw right into the thick of us, for a regular jolly scramble.”

“But how did it happen, think you?” asked one.

“Nay, that’s what no one can tell; but I guess we shall find out before morning.”

“I reckon there never could be an hour’s difference between Kettleby time, and Cumberworth time. Our Church clock gets a bit out of order at times; but the clockmaker was cleaning the works the week before last. I can’t understand it.”

“Such a disappointment for every one, Mrs. Cockerton! I see you took all your little ones with you!”

“Bless their hearts, Mr. Potchett, how could I leave them at home when I expected that they might have such a sight as we should none

of us see again if we lived to be fourscore? And nothing did they see, and they have been well-nigh squeezed to death in the crowd, and not a morsel of victual or drink have they tasted, for some good-for-nothing thief made a snatch at the basket that little Bill was carrying, and cut away with it in a moment."

"What a shame! But it's always the way. Rich folks never think of the poor. They take precious good care of themselves. They get all the best places, and are sure to be in time, I'll warrant 'em."

"Nay, not all of them, Mr. Potchett. There was Sir Tukesbury shut out, and unable to get in for love or money. My word! didn't he storm though? Harry Snell said he looked like a purple cabbage, for his face was just black with vexation and rage. Well, he's a magistrate, and can fight his own battles. And I reckon they'll catch it, be they who they may, that made Sir Tukesbury an hour too late for the show."

"But suppose there was all that difference in the London clocks, and the Prince was going by them?"

"Why, Sir Tukesbury is like enough to tell him to his face, that he ought to have had manners enough to have waited till the gentry of the county was ready for him."

"I believe I can tell how it happened," cried another traveller, joining the group whom Mr. Smith was now contriving to overhear.

"How? How?" inquired half a score of voices.

"Why, 'tis all along with that queer creature Becky Beccles. There's Bob Metcalf says that she went and altered the church clock, just to throw all the parish wrong."

"Now heard ye ever the like of that? But it was just such a mischievous trick as folks like her delight in. For my part, though, I always thought that Becky was more rogue than fool."

"Like enough, Joe; but Harry said she was put up to it by the new Curate."

"The what?"

"The new parson, that's come down to take old Gibson's work."

"And what business had he," (I suppress the oaths,) "to meddle or make with our clock?"

"Ah lad! that's where it is. 'Tis just the way with these parsons; always poking their noses into things that don't concern them; will have a finger in every pie; but this gentleman will find that he has burnt his fingers, I reckon."

"I wish I had him under the pump!" cried one.

"I wish some of our lads would toss him in

a blanket as they did old Podmore when he stole the pig," cried another.

"He deserves tarring and feathering," exclaimed a third. "I wish I could catch him when our tar-pot is on the fire."

"Ha, ha, ha! well said, Joe; why don't you invite him to dine with you at Cadger's Green?"

"Ay, ay, I should like to see a parson at Cadger's Green," cried a dark, hairy tinker; "they're a kind of cattle that don't often visit us; but, when they do come, we knows how to treat them."

"Why, Dick, what do you do with them?"

"We mostly *stuones* 'em, lad."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLEASURES OF THE TABLE.

"Time travels in divers paces with divers persons. I'll tell you who time ambles withal; who time trots withal; who time gallops withal; and who he stands still withal."

As you like it.

"Now if I had had the picking, that is just the place," thought Mr. Smith to himself, "where I should have liked to have set myself down. Such a population as that of Cadger's Green would have been the very thing to my taste. I can't conceive anything more interesting than to be located in a spot in which the constable or the exciseman would not dare to show their faces. Of course it would be presumption, a tempting of Providence, to seek such a position, but to find oneself in it, all retreat cut off, and nothing left but to grapple with one's difficulties, and to fight out the inevitable battle to the end,—dear me! the thought quite exhilarates me." And he positively rubbed his hands with delight. "I should like to do some good in the world," continued

the worthy man,—“not mere building on another man’s foundation, or watering that which some one else has planted, but to find some rugged uncultivated desert, and turn it into a garden. There is something very depressing in the dull propriety of a half-christianized parish. It seems to me as if those places which are by way of being well looked after, and in which a kind of jog-trot decency reigns, are little better than a swamp, moral and religious. Such a stagnation about them ! No life ! No progress ! They neither burn the ricks, nor stone the parson ; but self-satisfaction is a bar to all developement of good. No hope, I fear,” (and he sighed) “that Cadger’s Green is within the parish of Cumberworth. I have conned that Ordnance Map over, till I know every name. I suppose it must be some wild, isolated, scrap of the old forest, for there is nothing so lawless as the remnant of a forest-population. Well, I must make inquiries about Cadger’s Green, and keep the subject before me. Something may grow out of it by and by.”

“It was curious enough, by the way,” he continued, after a pause, “that I should have come in for such hard words with respect to myself. I am very sorry for the disappointment to which all these poor folks have been exposed. They get a holyday so seldom, that when it comes they ought to have a full enjoy-

ment of it, and I am sure, if I could have guessed that setting the clock to the true time would have thrown them out in their calculations, and made them too late for the show, I would have gone round to every house in the place to explain what I had done. But how could I possibly anticipate such a result? Well, everything is for the best. There is no use in fretting or fashing. And as I have taken the matter in hand, I had better go through with it, and insist that the church clock should always tell the true time. 'Tis a matter of no great consequence, but a man's firmness and decision of character have been evidenced before now under a less responsible charge than that of the parish clock."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but am I not addressing the Reverend Mr. Smith?"

The speaker was very hot, and very much out of breath, and the cut of the fustian, and the smell of ammonia, (more simply and less scientifically,—of *the stables*) indicated that he was a groom or a helper.

"Yes, my friend, I am Mr. Smith; and who are you? and what did you want with me?"

"Please, sir, I'm the odd man in Sir Tukesbury Twigge's stables, and the butler bade me run up the road, and see if I could see anything of you, and whether you was coming to

dinner. There's ever such a lot of carriage company down at the Court, and they waited half an hour or more for you before Sir Tukesbury would allow the dinner to be served : and they have sat down to dinner these twenty minutes."

It is needless to say that Mr. Smith's first act was to make a plunge at his watch : his second was to wonder what strange epidemic had seized the clocks at Cumberworth. It was perfectly distracting for a man of his punctual habits to be located in a place where no clock could be relied on. As for his own infallible timekeeper, the gift of Smith, of Smithfield, no misgiving disturbed his mind with reference to *that*. It was as regular as himself,—had never been in a watchmaker's hands during the eight years in which it had been in his possession. Next to himself, his watch was the thing in the world in which he had the greatest confidence : or rather, he had, in one sense, more confidence in his watch than in himself. "I am sure that I am going wrong, somehow or other, every day and all day : but my watch never goes wrong." So Mr. Smith was wont to say, and to say with the most entire sincerity. His zeal and energy did not at all prevent him from being humble about himself, though he sometimes spoke and acted as if his humility was a very dormant quality. The

new broom that sweeps so clean was wielded by him with so much activity, that the true features of the sweeper were sometimes obscured by the dust which he raised.

It is never pleasant to be late for dinner. Your very fine gentleman, indeed, who can do nothing like other folks, and who, having nothing peculiarly attractive in his manners or conversation, is nevertheless anxious to be conspicuous for something, does, every now and then, make himself remarkable by being always and systematically late for everything; but a man who is really high-bred is too full of courtesy not to be considerate of others, and too conscious of the claims of self-respect to exhibit vanity or conceit in this kind of way. It must, indeed, be allowed that the period between the arrival of the first guest, and the happy moment when dinner is on the table, is a trying time to carnivorous animals. We have endured occasions on which we could have perpetrated as impatient and hungry a howl as the wildest beast in the Zoological Gardens. Happy is the man who glides in at one end of the room, while an opening door at the other end reveals in the distance a blaze of light and a damask table-cloth. It is weary woe to be too early, and to be compelled to exhaust a nature already exhausted by efforts at small talk, when

one is longing for small beer; but to be very late,—at any rate if you have a particle of shyness in your composition,—is far worse. Cold soup, and flabby fish with agglutinated sauce, have no charms for me; and courting, as I do, universal popularity, it gives me no slight pang to occupy the chair which the nearest sitter on either side has hoped to see continuously vacant, since its occupation must confine the action of their hands and arms to the extent of that exhibited by the fins of a turtle. And if anything can add to the disagreeableness of the situation, it is that consciousness of heat and confusion which makes one ten times hotter.

Mr. Smith entered Sir Tukesbury's dining-room, very perturbed, very shy, and very hot. He felt that there was dust upon his shoes, and had a sort of conviction that that was the sole object on which everybody's eyes must inevitably rest. He was conscious that his white neck-tie (Mr. Smith was rather a dab at tying a neckcloth) was a little on one side; and, through being somewhat limp, had sunk so low beneath his chin, as that whoever sat on the opposite side of the table would detect the loss of the button on the collar of his shirt: he had had all day a horn or feather of hair sticking out preternaturally on one side of his head: no efforts had quite availed to smoothe it down

even before he left home; and he was satisfied that, under existing circumstances, it *must* have cocked itself up again. And then, O how hot he was! hot with the speed with which his walk had been concluded on a very hot day; hot with the nervousness of facing a room full of strangers; hot with the smell of turtle soup, and very high venison, or some kindred abomination, which turned his stomach as effectually as if he had held his nose to a bottle of cod liver oil, and made his shirt, as he thought, stick like a plaster to his body whenever he moved.

"I hope you will forgive us, Mr. a Brown," ("Smith, Sir Tukesbury," whispered the butler.) "Mr. Smith, I hope you will forgive us for sitting down. My old friend Yellowly is an invalid who suffers from waiting long." (Mr. Yellowly's dyspepsia was disporting itself over something which an ostrich could have hardly digested.) "And in fact, we had quite given you up. It has been a most unfortunate day for us all. I fear your visit to Kettleby has ended in disappointment."

"I have not been to Kettleby, Sir Tukesbury; but some unfortunate error in the clocks . . ."

Mr. Smith was conscious, almost without seeing it, that all the guests had raised their heads to look at him; and there was a little,

short cough, or clearing of the throat here and there, as much as to say, "Pray go on, sir; I wonder what you have got to say for yourself."

But Lady Twigge broke in with, "There's a place on the other side of the table, between Major Massie and Miss Katherine Cunningham. Allow me to introduce you to them."

The Major—six feet four, and broad and hirsute in proportion—looked, as a man does whose very agreeable conversation is brought to a full stop by some exceedingly unpleasant intrusion. Miss Kate, who believed herself to be on the high road to matrimony, welcomed the new-comer as if he had been an earwig. Both perfectly civil, with a civility of the most freezing description. Mr. Smith inevitably set his chair upon Miss Cunningham's sky-blue silk gown, and with the same action joggled the Major's arm, who was at the moment helping himself to salt, which was therefore deposited in the middle of his plate instead of on its side.

"There is turtle-soup, Mr. Smith, and green pea," said Lady Twigge.

"Thank you, neither. You must allow me to suffer for my want of punctuality. If you will permit me to make my dinner off this course," (the cheese had been set upon the table,) "I shall do very well. I assure you, I quite enjoy a dinner of bread and cheese."

A short cough from Mrs. Podlington, and a look at Sir Tukesbury, as much as to say, "Take him at his word."

But Sir Tukesbury was not the man to slight a guest. If he had any thoughts of vengeance, (which indeed he had not, though by no means in a good humour with his new acquaintance,) he would not restrict him to bread and cheese. He was too hospitable, too fond of showing off the luxuries of Cumberworth Court, to do that. And he thereby inflicted, very unconsciously, a much heavier punishment than mere abstinence would have been. He quietly insisted upon Mr. Smith eating his dinner. And this, gentle reader, implied a good exhibition of the art of tormenting. Mr. Smith was speedily brought to the conviction that he must make himself agreeable, or eat. If he talked, he would keep his neighbours waiting : if he ate, the sound of his own mastication would make him shyer and shyer every mouthful he devoured. And his entrance had seemed to extinguish conversation. There was a dead pause : and when he chanced to look up, fourteen guests, a butler, two footmen, and a page, were all watching him : six and thirty eyes were fixed on him at once : were undoubtedly contemplating the dust on his shoes, the loss of the shirt-button, the limpness of his tie, the impropriety of that

rebellious lock of hair, which would stick up when it ought to lie down. If a man can be said to run the gauntlet who is sitting still, Mr. Smith was indisputably in that condition.

It was in vain that he declined soup, and abjured fish; that he bowed off rissolles, and pâtés, and blanquettes, and cotelettes, and filets,—the terrible things with terrible names, of whose composition he was ignorant, but which Sir Tukesbury pressed upon him with as much earnestness as if life would be intolerable without them: the dishes seemed to multiply like Banquo's descendants, or to grow like the heads of the hydra: the more he declined, the more were forthcoming. A slice of mutton was really a comfort to him, and if he might have eaten it under the table, or outside the door, he would have done pretty well; but as it was, the three dozen eyes were all upon him: even the epergne gave him no protection. He had nothing for it but to bolt his unmasticated food with all the speed in his power, then, in despair, to swallow a glass of sherry the wrong way, and lastly, to choke till even spiteful Mrs. Podlington herself was frightened. However, the choke saved him from the protracted miseries whether of eating or declining the delicacies, sweet or savoury, of the second course.

And so, in due time, the dessert was put upon the table; and as the servants withdrew, and the gaze of five pair of eyes was withdrawn, the Curate of Cumberworth breathed more freely. Moreover, the spell was broken which had first produced an awful pause, and then toned the conversation down to a whisper, as the guests had made a voluntary or involuntary scrutiny of the stranger who had kept them waiting, and who had a still heavier imputation hanging over his head, as having caused some of the assembled party to be too late for the great event of the day.

"And so," said Mrs. Podlington, addressing herself to Major Massie, "poor Mademoiselle Rosalie was not in fault, after all."

"Why, no," responded the Major. "As soon as Jack saw what a fuss Isabella was making about her traps, vowing she couldn't appear at Kettleby, and protesting that she hadn't a bonnet in the world that was fit to be seen, without saying a word to any body, what does he do (like a good-natured fellow as he is,) but send up a man by the express train to London, with a letter to Mademoiselle, charging her as she valued the custom of Temple-Bossington, to send a bonnet by the bearer, who was allowed just one hour in London."

"Well, and what happened? for your sister never made her appearance."

"Poor darling !" sighed Miss Cunningham.

"Just the sort of thing that always does happen on these occasions. There was a smash on the line; the train got off the rails somewhere on the Overton embankment; the luggage vans and two or three carriages were capsized into a pond; Jack's groom was half drowned, and Isabella's bonnet made its appearance, with an extemporized wreath of duckweed upon it, an hour after the Kettleby fun was over."

"How truly vexatious !" exclaimed Mrs. Podlington, in a tone of the tenderest sympathy; though finding in her heart of hearts something not altogether disagreeable in the misfortune of her best friend.

"Vexatious enough," continued the Major, "but that was not all; for at the self-same time appeared the other bonnet, which, as Mademoiselle Rosalie had declared, had been sent off two days before, and ought to have been at the Bossington station in plenty of time."

"And why didn't it make its appearance?" inquired two or three voices at once.

"Ah, exactly; that's just what Jack asked: for he was in a proper rage, as you may guess, with the station-master. 'Here have we got two bonnets to pay for, and a man's expenses to London and back; and all to no purpose, just because you fellows don't give yourselves the

trouble to have goods properly delivered.' And then he vowed it should be as much as the man's place was worth."

"And so it ought to be," said Miss Cunningham.

"Jack is likely enough to keep his word; for when his blood is once up, it doesn't readily cool down again. 'Tis true the station-master declared that the fault wasn't his, and that the box had been carried off in mistake by some scamp or dolt of a passenger: but that's an excuse that is always ready to hand whenever it is wanted."

Mr. Smith was hot enough already; and the judicious reader, who is already conversant with the facts of the case, will anticipate that here was fuel to make him hotter. But if so, he has entirely failed to appreciate that good, simple-hearted parson's character. A man of the world would, it is likely, under such circumstances, have kept his own counsel, and made no confession. A moral coward would, perhaps, have raised suspicion by his confusion, and lost the respect of those around him by the ambiguities of either his words or his silence. Mr. Smith had his infirmities, like other men, but there was no littleness in his character. He was above all that. He might (without meaning it) make himself an enemy, but no man

would despise him. Major Massie's words gave him self-possession on the instant. He was master of the situation, and at his ease at once.

"May I ask?" he inquired, "whether the lady of whom you are speaking is Mrs. John Smith, of Temple-Bossington?" And as he made the inquiry, the limp neck-cloth, and the dusty shoes, the heat of his hurried walk, and the effects of the choke were felt no more. Major Massie assented. "Then I fear, sir, that however unintentionally, I have been the cause of Mrs. Smith's disappointment. When I was deposited at the Cumberworth station the day before yesterday, the guard, whom I had, perhaps, made impatient by my remarking that the train was behind its time, threw down the box among my luggage, and started the train before I could make him understand what he had done. I did what I could to remedy the mishap by charging the Cumberworth station-master to forward the box by the next passenger train, and by paying him to do so; but if I had looked after my own luggage as I ought, instead of getting into a discussion about the time-table, this very unfortunate circumstance would not have happened. I am sensible that I can do nothing now to atone for my share in what has given so much disappointment; but I hope you

will not think me impertinent if I beg you to convey to your sister the expression of my apology, and very sincere regrets."

Major Massie had nothing for it but to make as good-humoured a reply as he could, and to apologise in turn for his own hasty judgment.

"You seem to take a particular interest in matters connected with the regulation of time," observed Mrs. Podlington, across the table. The words were spoken in a tone which might have only implied an amiable desire on the lady's part to change the conversation, and to put a stranger at his ease; but those who knew Mrs. Podlington understood them better. Amiability was not one of her weaknesses.

"I have not regulated my own as I ought to have done to-day," answered the culprit, simply, "or I should not have been guilty of the rudeness of coming to our kind host's table after you had sat down. I hope that he, too, will accept my apologies," he continued, looking towards Sir Tukesbury, whose gracious reply was anticipated by Mrs. Podlington's, "Not a doubt of it," uttered, as before, with much apparent civility, but with a slight curl of the lip which conveyed to the rest of the party an expression of her conviction that the later the period of the Curate's arrival, the more agreeable would it have been to the company gene-

rally. "But, by the way, Mr. Smith," she asked, suddenly, "is it true that you induced poor Sir Tukesbury to alter the time of his stable clock, and so made him, and all the parish besides, too late to meet the Prince at Kettleby?"

"Certainly, madam; I apprized Sir Tukesbury of the difference between his stable clock and Greenwich time, (which I had had an opportunity of obtaining on the previous morning) for I apprehended that the Royal party being so punctual, it was important he should have the correct time."

"And the Prince was true to his time, Mr. Smith. I know that for a fact. The Mayor had got the Greenwich time as well as yourself. Of course, Mr. Smith, you made a mistake."

"We are all liable to mistakes, Madam, but I took very particular notice, and my watch never plays me false."

"You are singularly fortunate, sir; of course you had not consulted it before you left home this evening, or you had not inquired what was Sir Tukesbury's dinner hour?"

"Indeed, Madam, I had been particularly careful in both respects. I cannot explain what has happened, but Sir Tukesbury himself assured me that his stable clock was not a good one, and the church clock at Cumberworth is a wretched affair."

"O yes," said the baronet, good-naturedly interposing, "I found the stable clock on the premises when I bought this place: it might have been here time out of mind."

"I am sure that time isn't likely to be out of any of our minds at present," continued Mrs. Podlington, warming with her subject. "There is nobody in the world, Sir Tukesbury, that is so good-natured as you are, and you and Lady Twigge bear your disappointment like angels: but every one can't be so forbearing. I only wish you could have heard what the Gladwins and the Henshaws said about it, or Admiral Venables. The Admiral was so vexed when he saw his poor little children crying at being excluded from the Town Hall, that he swore he'd call a parish meeting on the subject. He said the church clock had been put half-an-hour wrong. I hope to goodness, Mr. Smith, you had nothing to do with that; for if you had, you will find the place too hot to hold you!"

"Mrs. Podlington," exclaimed poor Lady Twigge, in despair, (the good soul had been sitting on thorns for the last half hour) "shall we go and have some coffee?"

And making the move, which the other lady could not but follow, this pleasant conversation came to a close.

CHAPTER X.

THE CARES OF OFFICE.

"Look ; he's winding up the clock of his wit : by and by it will strike."

The Tempest.

"If you please, sir," said Mrs. Finch to her lodger, on his return from Cumberworth Court, "Mrs. Beccles has been here twice since you have been out, wanting to see you."

Mr. Smith was looking somewhat weary and perturbed, and as if he would have liked to go straight to bed ; but a call to anything like parish work seemed to revive him at once. "I'll go down to her directly, Mrs. Smith."

"Don't think of such a thing, sir. She has been in bed and asleep, no doubt, for hours. She has no one to sit up for," continued Mrs. Finch, as she feigned to suppress a yawn, "and always gets to bed in decent time. Mr. Blandy never used to go out at night, except in case of serious illness ; indeed very seldom then, for I used my own judgment for the most part, and

didn't say anything about it till morning. Sick folks are none the better for being disturbed in the middle of the night; and besides, I wasn't going to have a man like Mr. Blandy, that was delicate himself, called up to go racketing about the parish in the dark, and perhaps lose his way, and fall into the river. And it wasn't to be expected that at my time of life I could put up with having my rest broken, and may be catch my death with cold in going down stairs to open the door for him when he came back."

"Well, Mrs. Finch, I hope you will never put yourself to that kind of trouble on my account. No doubt I shall often be out at night; but you have only to supply me with a latch-key, you know . . ."

"A latch-key, sir! did you say a latch-key? Why, I wouldn't have a latch-key on a door of mine, no, not to please Mr. Blandy himself. Mrs. Crackanthorpe used to say that it would be hard to tell who had done the devil's work best, the man that invented latch-keys, or lucifer-matches: it was murder made easy, she said, in both cases, only the man with the lucifer-match made it serve his purpose till he had killed his neighbour, and the man with the latch-key made it serve his purpose till he had killed himself,—his soul, if not his body, poor creature! No, sir, no latch-keys for me."

"As you please, my good madam," answered the Curate smiling; "though I hope I should not abuse the privilege, if you thought proper to confer it on me. Only you must distinctly understand that my time belongs to my flock, and that I am as much at their disposal at night as by day. Can you tell me what it was that Mrs. Beccles wanted: she is rather eccentric, is she not?"

"Well, sir, she was just in one of her queer ways when there is no knowing what she may say or do next. She is much to be pitied no doubt, but she is uncommonly sly, sir, and that's the truth of it. If you don't take care, sir, you'll find she's too deep for you, and she seemed up in arms against you already, as it is; something about the alteration of the church clock, I believe; some of those great lads that had been to Kettleby and missed the show, had been abusing her; and she was quite put out: but she'll be sure to tell you all her troubles to-morrow. You'd better take your candle, sir, and go to bed now. It has struck eleven."

"Struck eleven!" ejaculated Mr. Smith.

"Yes, sir, by my house clock; and the church clock struck as you came in at the house-door. I wonder you didn't hear it."

Mr. Smith pulled out his own watch and looked at it. An expression of wonder passed

over his face, and he put the instrument to his ear before proceeding to wind it up. "Thank you, Mrs. Finch, I am going directly," he said, as the hand-candlestick was forced upon him. "I am going directly; but really, I never was in such a place in my life. The variations of time are perfectly distracting. Punctuality will be impossible while things remain as they are. Every idle child will have an excuse for being late for school: the congregation will feel no shame if they are not in their places when Divine service begins. So far as clocks are concerned, it may be morning at one end of the village when it is evening at the other. The first question I shall ask the school-children must be, 'When it is 9 a.m. at Copenhagen, what o'clock is it at Buenos Ayres?' What a fortunate thing it is that in all this confusion I have a watch on whose correctness I can rely, and which will keep the rest in order."

And with this comfortable reflection Mr. Smith sought repose from the toils of the day, and speedily obtained it.

With the dawn of another morning came renewed vigour and eagerness for work, an eagerness stimulated, perhaps, by the remembrance that it was now Saturday, and that the morrow would find him publicly installed in his office

as the sole occupant of the reading-desk and pulpit in Cumberworth church.

"By the way," said Mr. Smith to himself, "I suppose I ought to call on old Gibson this morning, and find out how they do things here. Queerish sort of people, some of those that I met with last night! I hardly knew what to make of that Mrs. Podlington. She was horribly vexed with me about the clock, and had had such a disappointment that her rudeness was quite excusable; but I can't help thinking that if by any accident I should do, or leave undone something which these Cumberworthians were used to in the celebration of Divine service,—if I should give out a hymn in a wrong place, or stand to the east when the Incumbent had faced the west, she is just the sort of body to impute all sorts of sinister motives, and insinuate all manner of heterodoxies. Yes, I had better see Gibson."

And therein, Mr. Smith, you must allow me to say that you judged wisely, and perhaps more wisely than from your antecedents in this veracious history might be expected. But if I have said anything which has caused any one to think of you otherwise than as of a thoroughly right-minded man, as less anxious to consider what is due to others, than intent upon discharging your own duties, I have done you very

great injustice. Your infirmities, such as they were, were but motes in the sunshine, not clouds that obscured its light; and if I note them, it is not with the odious object of ridiculing the weaknesses of a good man, but for the purpose of showing that such little specks and blemishes will, unless they be recognized and got rid of, impede and even mar a course of usefulness. You were no self-willed youth, unable to see wisdom in any one but yourself; the worst that could be said of you was that your eagerness to do right was greater than your experience of the best manner of doing it. And let me tell you that, as times go, this is no small praise. An old-fashioned parson with whom I am acquainted was speaking to me not long since of the hardships of our curates' lot; of the irresponsible tyranny which a Bishop has it in his power to exercise over them; of the want of sympathy with them, and of consideration towards them, which their employers frequently exhibit; the drudgery devolved on them; the rarity of the opportunities afforded them for study, or relaxation; the smallness of the stipend allotted them; and the utter absence of anything like a provision for them in infirmity and old age: "but after all," said he, "I never saw a race better calculated to fight their battles, and to hold their own, than

the curates of the present day. Almost all with whom I have had to do have been more ready to teach than to learn, and have usually given me an intimation, at the end of a week's acquaintance, that I know nothing about my flock, or the proper manner of conducting the Church service. The first gentleman who told me this, told it so authoritatively, that, knowing my own shortcomings, I could not but believe him. Accordingly, I submitted myself meekly to his guidance till he nearly alienated my flock, and emptied the church. When it came to that," continued my friend, "we parted. His successor, no less confident, assured me (and I believe with very considerable truth), that all that had been done had been done wrong. And so he worked out his system, till it worked him off likewise. Number Three, like his predecessors, was a zealous reformer, and as he happened to be a good deal richer than I am, for the time his reign lasted I was entirely put upon the shelf: the parson that had the purse was deferred to in all things. But he, too, went his way; and when at the end of a fortnight's residence I was assured by Number Four, that One, Two, and Three, had been all wrong, and that he had a set of traditions of his own,—'the way in which things were done in my last curacy,' which he required to be

immediately adopted, as the only terms on which he could vouchsafe to continue his patronage of myself and my flock, I was fain to say to him, that as I was pretty well convinced that none of us will be damned by proxy, I had made up my mind to face my own responsibilities, and to do my work my own way; that I was parson of Oldacres, and that he was curate; and that if he chose to work with me (I was old enough to be his father, and had held the cure before he was born) he must be content to work *under* me." Of course my old friend had laid strong colours on his canvass, and being somewhat of a humorist had probably exaggerated the imperiousness of his curates, and his own submissiveness. Still, there was truth enough in his satire to give it a sting. And I suppose the conclusion of the whole matter is that the rule of "Bear and forbear" is as needful for the curate in his intercourse with the rector, as it is for the rector in his intercourse with the curate.

"I had better have an interview with Gibson," said our hero to himself; "but as that Mrs. Beccles wants to see me, and I shall pass her house in my way, I will take her first."

In five minutes' time he is tapping at the door. In order to reach the door it was necessary to pass the window, and through the win-

dow Becky Beccles is plainly discernible in the act of peeling potatoes. "What a mistake!" muttered Mr. Smith to himself. "What a pity I was not here a bit sooner, I should have put her up to boiling them in their skins." As his figure darkens the lattice in passing by it, Mr. Smith is sensible that the inmate of the cottage has just turned her head the least in the world, and by a stealthy glance has recognized her approaching visitor.

Tap, tap, tap.

No answer.

Tap, tap, tap. "Not at home. Nobody with any gentility in them makes calls at this time in the morning!" Tap, tap, tap, goes the Curate's knuckle once more. "Not at home, I say. Bless the man! is he deaf?" Mr. Smith, half disconcerted, half amused, hesitated whether or no he should pass on, but remembering the good lady's eccentricity, and that she had been twice down to his lodgings to inquire after him, he touched the latch, and the door flew open. "I hope I don't intrude, my good madam," said he as he stood on the threshold. The knife in Becky's hand worked itself rather more rapidly than before round the kidney potatoe, and a long sinuous ribbon of rind wriggled from her lap to the floor, but she did not vouchsafe to raise her head, and

answer she made none. "I hope I don't intrude," said Mr. Smith taking off his hat, as he came into the room, and speaking louder, upon the calculation that he had not been heard. "I understood, Mrs. Beccles, that you wanted to see me."

"Ay, ay," was the lady's reply, her head still over the potatoes; "but he's in great want of a bird, who will give a groat for an owl."

"Madam!"

"Ay, and he loves bacon well, that licks the pig-stye door."

"Mrs. Beccles, I really don't understand you."

"That's what the man said that didn't know a bee from a battledore. 'Tisn't my fault if some folk's wit may be trussed up in an egg-shell," answered Mrs. Beccles, as she shook her lapful of potatoes into the saucepan that stood beside her.

"Really, Mrs. Beccles, this is a very unusual method of speaking to a clergyman. I understood from Mrs. Finch that you came down to my lodgings twice last night, in search of me."

"Very well, sir; because I sought you, it doesn't follow that I wished you to seek me."

"No, Mrs. Beccles, but I wished to show you that I was anxious to do anything in my

power to serve you, or any of my parishioners. I am a stranger at present, but when you know me better, I trust that”

“We shall all love you, as a cat loves mustard.” And Becky turned her back on her visitor, and proceeded to set the saucepan on the fire. Mr. Smith was puzzled. Was this strange demeanour the waywardness of an unsettled mind, or was there some feeling of personal irritation against himself? An angry glance from the restless grey eye seemed to betoken the latter, so he set himself to find the cause of offence.

“Well, well, Mrs. Beccles, time will show: we won’t talk about that now. I am sure you had something to say to me last night, and as I am here, won’t you say it now?”

“Do you really wish to hear what I have got to say to you?”

“Certainly.”

“Very well, then. You’re a tall man, Mr. Smith; and you’re a dark man, Mr. Smith; and you’re a spectacled man, Mr. Smith: tall, and dark, and spectacled, Mr. Smith: that’s what you are, Mr. Smith, and that’s what you will be now and evermore, Mr. Smith. And that’s what I’ve got to say to you, Mr. Smith!” And she folded her arms, throwing herself back in her seat, with her head on one side, and then

sucking in her lips, gave a sharp nod, as though she had delivered herself of an apothegm on which her hearer could not do better than meditate for the remainder of his days.

"Quite true, Mrs. Beccles, quite true," said the Curate good-humouredly; "but you hardly came down twice last night to tell me that. What did you want to tell me then?"

"You will have it, will you?" cried the old woman, starting up and facing him so suddenly that Mr. Smith started back. "Well then, aren't you ashamed of yourself," and she clenched her hand, and stamped on the ground with all the excitement of an angry lunatic, "aren't you ashamed of yourself to have brought down all the worthless rascals in Cumberworth to insult me, and call me all to pieces, and hoot me, and threaten to toss me in a blanket, and put under the pump, and, worse than all, to call me Bedlam Becky, and say if I wasn't a maniac they'd murder me,—me, that's got more sense in my head, and clearness of judgment, and decision of mind, and nice perception, and calmness and serenity, than the judge on the bench, and the . . . well, what was I saying?"

"You were complaining that some people had annoyed you."

"Annoyed? They called me an old cat,—

an old cat, sir, remember that, and Mother Moonshine, and said they'd be the death of me, just because I'd given way to that whimsy of your's, and let you alter the clock, and so made them late for the show at Kettleby. Poor creatures, they are mad with disappointment, and so a sober-minded person like me, could not but pity them while I blamed their rudeness: for they are but ignorant beasts after all; a scum, and a rabble of paupers: but for you, sir, there is no excuse whatever. You have brought me into collision with the old gentleman in drab, up in the belfry. If ever I set foot there again, he'll make me more his bond-slave than ever. I knew there was something amiss when I heard all the bells at work in all the country round, yesterday morning. They said it was for the Prince, but I knew who was using his magical instrument in our church tower, and that all the belfries within the circle of hieroglyphics were answering him! And not only that, but you've made me a byword and hissing to all the louts and ragamuffins in Cumberworth,—me that was an humble friend of the Duchess of Droitwich, and that but for the change of Ministry should have been appointed syllabub-maker in ordinary to good Queen Charlotte, and the sweet princesses."

"I very much regret that you have been so

used, Mrs. Beccles, but I assure you I will not lose an hour in taking the blame on myself: it shall be made clear for the time to come that you were in no way blameable for this unlucky mischance. You shall not be teased by your neighbours as though you had caused the error in the clock."

"You are right there, sir, at any rate. I thank Providence that having all my senses in a superlatively healthy condition, I can see my way clearly at all times. No, sir, I shall not expose myself again to the jeers of unmannerly paupers. From henceforth I have done with time. Minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years may elapse, but I shall no more pretend to regulate their movements. My discretion has been questioned, my fitness for the responsibility I had undertaken contravened. A victim to the factions which distract the country, I have terminated my chronological career, and I come like Themistocles to—to—cut my stick, in short, and abdicate the—the steeple. You have heard, no doubt, of the power of the keys. Up to the present time it has been mine. But you have undermined my authority, and derogated from my dignity, and so you may take hence this worthless bauble," and suiting the action to the word, Mrs. Beccles dived into the depths of her pocket, and bringing out the

heavy key of the turret-door, dashed it down on the table, "take it, sir, take it, and harass me no longer with your presence and importunities."

Mr. Smith would have spoken, but snatching the key off the table, she thrust it into his hand, and all but pushing him out of the house, slammed the door behind him, and bolted it. But he had not proceeded many yards, before the bolt was withdrawn, and Becky stealthily crept up to him. "Beware of the big bell," she whispered. "He always sits behind it: and if he catches you as he caught me, he'll make you his slave for ever. You needn't tell him, you know, that I have handed the key over to you; but, if he should ask, you can say that you borrowed it till John Dibble comes home again to-night, and that I shall make a point of stepping down to the churchyard this evening, as soon as the rooks are gone home, in order to receive his commands, if he has any for me,—the old, cruel, curmudgeon!" she muttered through her teeth, and disappeared as rapidly as she had approached.

"Come," said Mr. Smith to himself, "there is some comfort in this at any rate! I shall be free from the old lady's vagaries, and manage the clock my own way. If I am to have some odium on my shoulders through this unlucky

disappointment at Kettleby, I may as well do the people good in spite of themselves, and find out, if I can, where the defects of the clock lie, so that it may be properly repaired hereafter."

A touch on his elbow made the Curate turn round, and to his dismay old Becky was again standing beside him. "I forgot," she whispered; "and when the leaves rustle in the trees in that queer way, I find I always forget, don't you? My brother sent me word this morning that he should not be back before ten o'clock to-night. He's coming by the late train, I reckon. And he bade me wind the clock up: it won't go beyond noon. And if it stops, they'll be grumbling down in the village; and worse than that, he that you know of," and she pointed towards the church, "will set the hieroglyphics in motion, and get my head under the big bell when the clapper is going, and make it ache for weeks after."

"Make yourself quite at ease, my good madam," said Mr. Smith, "I will carefully attend to all your instructions." Whereupon Mrs. Beccles laying her hand upon her heart, and making such a curtesy as she might have bestowed on Royalty itself, retreated into her brother's house, Mr. Smith proceeding directly towards the church.

Arrived at the foot of the tower our hero took breath, and looked about him. At the south-east angle stood the turret with its narrow, winding, staircase, admittance to which was given by a small, low, doorway, closed by a door which appeared to be of the same age with the tower itself, and which had been apparently constructed with as much solidity as if the tower had been intended to stand a siege. It was five or six inches thick ; formed of a double series of oak planks, placed lengthways, and breadthways, and was held together with heavy square-headed nails. The hinges and lock were of the same massive character.

“ ‘ With iron clasp’d, and with iron bound,’ ” muttered Mr. Smith, as turning the key, the lock shot back. “ The old fellows that built such doors as these never grudged their material. I wonder how long it would take to ‘ sport ’ such an ‘ oak ’ as this. And now for the clock ! ” With that he scrambled up the stairs, noting the dust and cobwebs in his progress, and settling his tactics against spiders and bell-ringers, made good his way up very crazy and perpendicular ladders, till he found himself in the clock-chamber.

“ Very dark, very fusty ! ” he exclaimed. “ I don’t at all wonder that the poor old lady’s dis-tempered imagination inclined her to people

these murky recesses with objects that frightened her. I wish I could find a candle. Well, sure enough here is one, but never a match. Well, I must do as well as I can in the twilight. I wish I knew more about clocks than I do; (I must get up the subject;) but there can be no difficulty in winding up a clock; at least if I can find the thing for winding it up with. Come, here it is, and here goes!"

Click, click, click, click!

"Dear me! I had no notion that the weights would be so heavy!"

Click, click, click, click!

"Heavier, and heavier every turn! What an immense length the ropes must be! I could not have imagined that it would be such a job!"

Click,—click,—click,—click.

"I suppose it's all right. I suppose I shall feel when I ought to stop."

Cli . . . ck——c-l-i-c-k.——Bang! Crash! crash, crash! Smashing timbers, falling planks, fragments and splinters flying in all directions. A dull heavy fall on a surface deep down below, as the bottom of a well. And before dense clouds of choking dust have had time to obscure it, a stream of daylight rushing upwards through the riven surface of more than one shattered floor!

"What upon earth has happened?" exclaimed

Mr. Smith in astonishment. "What can I have done? O, I see," as he caught a glimpse of a rope bounding about like a long-fettered captive who had suddenly been restored to the free use of his limbs. "I see. I have overwound the clock, and the rope has given way, and the weight has smashed through the ceiling of the tower into the Church below! How very unfortunate! I wonder what I had better do. Go to old Gibson I suppose, if, ugh! ugh! ugh! I am not suffocated first with this horrid dust, and don't break my neck in getting down. I wonder what he will say. Well, what can't be cured must be endured!" And making his way as best he could, he speedily reached the churchyard, and hastened, hot, dusty, and dilapidated, to the parsonage.

But misfortunes never come single. "Old Gibson" was suffering so much that he was not to be seen; and more than an hour elapsed before good Mrs. Gibson made her appearance, pale and anxious, and only careful to curtail the visit as much as possible, and hasten back to her husband's bed-side. She begged Mr. Smith to excuse her from taking Mr. Gibson's opinion about anything just then; he was much too poorly. She felt sure that Mr. Smith would conduct the service in a proper manner to-morrow: as for the details, Mrs. Finch or

anybody could tell him what was the custom at Cumberworth in matters which were various in various places; she had the highest opinion of his zeal and good judgment, only he must allow her to go up stairs. And with respect to the clock it was certainly very unfortunate; but accidents would happen. Very likely the works were not at all injured, and when John Dibble came back, he was so handy and knowing in those kind of things, that very probably he would get all right before morning. The broken floor? O, she was really unable to advise about that, but Mr. Smith had better see the parish churchwarden, Mr. Stintagroats, at once, and have the necessary repairs made.

Mr. Smith did as he was bid. And he had his reward; for upon his notifying to Mr. Stintagroats his desire to pay for the damage he had done, not only was that worthy official propitiated, but carpenters were found, and the necessary repairs made before nightfall. It was even intimated that another seat should be found on the morrow for Sir Tukesbury's servants, upon whose pew the clock-weight had fallen, smashing it with as much vigour as if it had been a member of the Ecclesiological Society. And if, when John Dibble came home, he found the old rope was useless, Mr. Stinta-

groat thought he could find some new rope that would answer the purpose.

The last rays of the setting sun were gilding the pinnacles of the old tower, as the last workman emerged from the turret stairs, and Mr. Smith closing the heavy door after him, double-locked it, and put the key in his pocket, returning homewards for the night.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, a long flight of rooks sailed before the eyes of Mrs. Beccles, in their passage from the Cumberworth fields to the skirts of the old forest. And thereupon that lady, sticking on her head such a bonnet as never was seen before, took her promised stroll to the churchyard. Whether she received any commands from the old gentleman through the belfry windows, I am unable to say, but she felt it her duty to apprise him that she had not neglected him. If she had carried a cardcase in her pocket, she might, perhaps, have thrust a card under the turret door. But not having any such article about her, she took a step which she satisfied herself would do as well: she picked up six pebbles from the gravel walk, and dropped them in succession into the capacious keyhole.

A story never loses by telling, and all the talk in Cumberworth that night was that the new parson had been in such a rage with Becky

Beccles for disappointing the people of the Kettleby show, that he wouldn't let her wind up the clock, but wound it up himself, and over-wound it, and that the weight in falling had carried him down fifty feet, through three floors into Sir Tukesbury's servants' pew, where the churchwarden had found him quite unhurt, reading the Thirty-nine Articles.

Such a parson must be worth seeing. All the parish was resolved to go to Church next day.

CHAPTER XI.

INFALLIBILITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

“You should ask me, what time of day ; there's no clock in the forest.”

As you like it.

It always gives everybody so much pain to expose the misdoings of everybody else, that it seems wonderful that they should ever be exposed at all. The explanation however is, as it should seem, to be found in the admirable manner in which human nature generally, and gossips in particular, sacrifice their inclinations to their moral obligations. They invariably allege that nothing but a strong sense of duty would induce them to reveal the facts which have come to their knowledge. And impelled by this conscientious gadfly, they perform their office unshrinkingly, and kill reputations north and south, east and west, with a perseverance that knows no weariness, and a placidity which no scruple harasses. They discharge a melan-

choly office, but they find their reward in the encomiums of an approving conscience. It is their only consolation.

Actuated by the same stern sense of what is due to my fellow-creatures, I feel myself called upon to proclaim to the world, that Mr. John Dibble (being one of those unfortunate people who, seldom getting a holyday, never know when to have done with it, when they have got it,) did not return to his anxious sister at Cumberworth on Saturday night, but staying with a sick brother at Liverpool till the last moment, did not arrive at home till Sunday morning. And then, having to milk the cow, and feed both the pigs and himself, and shave, and get into his Sunday trim generally, it was nearly ten o'clock before he was ready to go down to the Church. He was altogether behind time, and to make it up as pleasantly as possible, the cow had strayed, and he cut his chin in shaving to an extent which made the stoppage of the hemorrhage anything but easy. Under such circumstances, the measure of his dismay may be imagined, when his sister announced to him that the key of the tower was in the custody of the curate,—a quarter of a mile off; that the rope that suspended the clock-weight had been broken,—and that Mr. Gibson had sent down a very particular message to request that he

would see that the clock was "all right, before church-time."

Breathless he arrived at Mrs. Finch's; breathless arrived at the church with the key in his hand; and still more breathless returned with the announcement that the key absolutely refused to fulfil its office; it would not turn in the lock; and consequently there was no possible means either of setting the clock in motion, or of ringing the church bells.

Mr. Smith, prepared for all emergencies, snatched up his sermon and his hat, and followed, or rather accompanied, the dismayed and dissolving sexton to the church. Idle lads with plush waistcoats, and marigolds and southernwood in their button-holes, were already loitering about the tower, and wondering "what the dickens was up with Measter Dibble, that the church warn't opened afore this time in the morning."

What could have happened to the key? The sexton was, of course, persuaded that the Curate had used it for a hammer (as he had often done himself) and bent the wards: but no, the key was right enough. It must be the lock: Mr. Smith must have injured that. "Nay, my good friend, I am quite sure that I used no violence: the key turned either way last night with perfect ease. I remember thinking how easily it

went, being such a heavy affair, and the lock so clumsy. Just let me try." So Mr. Smith took the key, and handling it as tenderly as Izaak Walton did the frog, he attempted gentle measures; but with no success. "Rabbit the key!" exclaimed the sexton, "we shall have the ringers here directly:" and with that, with his iron hand and sinewy gripe, he made a strenuous effort, and succeeded in turning the key round. But alas! no bolt flew back, the lock remained fixed in the stanchion. The sexton drew out the key, and behold, half the wards were broken off short in the lock. A shout of derision from the lads! "Well, Johnny, lad, you *have* put your foot in it now. There will be no bell-ringing this day!"

"What do you mean?" cried Mr. Smith. "It's true enough," said Dibble, looking very sheepish. "O, but this will never do," exclaimed the Curate. "We must have the door broken open. If one of you lads will run for the blacksmith, and ask him to bring his crow-bar, I'll give you" "Twenty crow-bars wouldn't do it afore church time," said the sexton, shaking his head with such a knowing air that Mr. Smith himself was daunted. "It would take a man half a day to get that door open, if he could do it then: but one of you may as well go down to the shop, and tell

Sparks to bring up his tools : he can be picking, while his reverence is preaching ; and may be he'll make a way for us before evening service. And some of you chaps, tell the neighbours, will you, that we can't ring the bells, and so they must get to church as well as they can."

Not one only, but all the lads turned round to make a start, happy to have something to do, and something to tell.

"Stop a moment," cried Mr. Smith, "they won't know what time of day it is ; the church clock has stopped."

"Our folks have got clocks in their houses ; —at least most of 'em has ;" said one of the youths.

"Ay, ay," was Mr. Smith's reply, "I dare say they have ; but cottage clocks seldom go together."

"If we'd gone by our clock at home," muttered a saucy-looking lad in the background, "we shouldn't have been all of us too late, as we were, to see the Prince at Kettleby. It was the church clock as throw'd us all out."

"Well, well, never mind about that now. I'll give you the true time, the time I mean to go by this morning," said Mr. Smith, drawing out his watch. It is now just twenty minutes to . . . eh ! twenty minutes to,"—"four," Mr.

Smith would have said, if he had declared the time announced by the hour hand of his watch : but Mr. Smith had a fair share of presence of mind, and instead of speaking he held his watch up to his ear. It was going, that was some comfort. And as he brought it again before him (it was what is called a hunting-watch,) he recognized the dent which had been caused by his struggles amid the woodwork of the bridge, two days before, in his adventure with the cows. The pressure of the indented surface had probably caught the hour-hand, without stopping the watch. That, at least, was the solution which presented itself to Mr. Smith's mind. Assuming, therefore, that the minute-hand was right, and guessing at the hour from the sun's height, he boldly announced the time of day as "twenty minutes to *eleven*."

But this was more than John Dibble was prepared to admit, for he too had a watch, and a watch, moreover, which had, in the course of the morning, been set to railway time. And rapid as Mr. Smith's movements had been, the momentary surprise on his face, and indecision of his manner had suggested to the sexton that the Curate's watch was not an indisputable authority. "I beg your pardon, sir, but it is only just ten minutes past ten. I set my watch in the station at Liverpool."

"This must be a proper impudent fellow," thought Mr. Smith to himself. "Fancy his comparing that wretched old turnip with this watch of mine which is every bit as good as a chronometer!" but he only said, "My good friend, you must forgive me for saying so, but that old-fashioned concern of your's must have lost considerably since you started on your journey."

"It does gain a bit sometimes, sir, but I never know'd it to lose."

"Well, well, a watch that gains to-day, may lose to-morrow. There must be something wrong about it. Ancient affairs like that are always capricious in their ways of going. I've experienced their vagaries scores of times. Now my own is a first-rate instrument, made by Ratchet of Leadenhall Street, that supplies half the merchants in London, whose time, you know, is their money. Just look at it," continued Mr. Smith, forgetting in his eagerness, the position of the hour hand.

"Why, bless your heart, sir, 'tis eighteen minutes to four!"

"Ah! that is eighteen minutes to eleven. It's all the same. I met with an accident the other day, and the case was dented in so that the hour hand catches now and then; but it's all right."

"Mayhap, sir, the minute hand catches as well as the hour hand. I reckon it is always the uppermost, and goes round the oftenest."

"Oh dear! that has nothing to do with it. My watch is quite right, (all but the accidental displacement of the hour hand): it always is right. I'll undertake to warrant its correctness."

"Well, sir, it is not for me to bandy words with you; it can be what time of day you please to make it, as the church clock is not going."

"Ah, true; you had better set your time with mine, say sixteen minutes to eleven. By the way, though, as the bells don't ring we should allow people a few minutes extra this morning. I will begin the service in twenty minutes."

How the recalcitrant sexton employed those twenty minutes I cannot take upon myself to say. That he was not overflowing with good humour I hold to have been pretty clearly ascertained. He was affronted that any one had meddled with his key during his absence; affronted that the clock had been wound up; affronted that the weight had gone off on its travels; affronted that the turret door refused to open; affronted at the aspersions thrown upon his own watch. In short, I should not be surprised, if, as was alleged, he actually did

exclaim that he had never seen "such a young upstart in all his life as the new curate, and that he, John Dibble, would teach him that he wasn't going to be thrust to the wall in that fashion, and treated as if he wasn't fit for the office he had held for five and twenty years." And I am half inclined to fear that the rumour was not altogether a myth which alleged that on that eventful morning he intimated to more than one of his neighbours, who, astonished at the silence of the bells, came down the Church lane to inquire the cause, that it wanted three quarters of an hour to Church time, while Mr. Smith's infallible watch showed but one.

When twenty minutes had elapsed, Mr. Smith rose from his seat in the vestry to proceed to the reading-desk. "Four minutes past eleven, Dibble. I shall go in now."

The sexton gave a short cough.

Whether he made it as expressive as Lord Burleigh's nod, I cannot say, but there was enough meaning in it to make the Curate stop. "You were thinking, Dibble, that as there are no bells ringing, I had better give the people more time."

"No, sir, I was thinking that it wants twenty minutes to our usual church hour."

"By your watch you mean?"

"Yes, sir; and by John Shaw's; and by Simon

Dixon's ; and Master Brown's ; and by the time of day."

"Oh, if I am not to begin Morning Service till all the watches in the parish agree, I shall never begin it at all."

"You can do as you think fit, sir. I wouldn't take upon me to advise."

Mr. Smith did not vouchsafe a reply, but waited five minutes longer, determining that it should not be his fault if the Cumberworth folk did not grow more punctual, and rejoicing exceedingly that the subject of his sermon was the value of time, and the duty of being true to our appointments, religious and secular.

Then Mr. Smith proceeded to the reading-desk. It was clearly a case of "Dearly beloved Roger." Not a soul in the Church but John Dibble and himself. What was to be done next? Mr. Smith was puzzled, and hardly knew what to do. Most people in his place would have quietly retreated to the vestry, and awaited the arrival of the congregation. What a pity it is that good qualities have such a knack of running into weaknesses! that firmness should be so apt to degenerate into obstinacy, self-reliance into self-conceit, and earnestness into eccentricity? Far be it from me to attempt to measure the proportions of human infirmity, and heroic virtue which were mingled

in Mr. Smith's proceedings on that remarkable day. I am merely the chronicler of events. It is the reader's business to draw conclusions, if such be his pleasure, and to profit by the warnings, which my narrative may seem to convey. Undoubtedly Mr. Smith had, like most of his neighbours, a strong penchant for having his own way ; but no man could seek it less on his own account. The object nearest his heart was to do good to others. Had he so far deceived himself as to be persuaded that he could only do good by getting his own way ?

And is such a persuasion altogether uncommon ? I wonder !

Mr. Smith did not retire to the vestry, but remained where he was ; not with the feelings of wounded vanity which are supposed to afflict the actor who plays to an empty house ; he was no actor, but in earnest ; his thoughts were of his office, rather than of himself ; and yet there was an expression on his face, not precisely of a martyr's resignation, but of patience under injury. At the end of five minutes, half a score of children went clattering up the stairs into the gallery, and about as many elderly people proceeded to their places. And with this congregation Mr. Smith began Morning Prayer. But it was an uncomfortable operation. There were few to make the general confession, and

the invitation to sing in the *Venite exultemus* produced a chant, indeed, from the barrel organ that John Dibble was grinding, but no responsive burst from congregation or choir. The Psalms and Lessons were gone through amid the perturbing sounds of creaking boots, rustling gowns, opening pews, and flapping hassocks. Nobody seemed to join in the canticles; everybody was too busy for that. All were wondering what had happened, and why it had happened; and the new Curate, who, somehow or other, was felt to be at the bottom of all the confusion, was being very diligently stared at, and every part of him which the reading-desk did not conceal, thoroughly scanned. The collects were intermingled with an audible whisper running from bench to bench among the open sittings, of "Eh! look ye! there's where he came through the roof!" produced by the discovery of the new boards which had been substituted in the place of those which had been fractured by the falling clock-weight. And the Litany had begun before the rattle of carriages, and the entry of the family from Cumberworth Court brought the interruptions of the morning to an end.

Under such circumstances it was that Mr. Smith delivered his first sermon at Cumberworth, and that sermon on the text, "There is

a time for every purpose and for every work." The sermon was a good, plain, useful sermon, in matter and in length just what Mr. Gibson had desired, and on an ordinary occasion would have produced about as much effect as sermons ordinarily do. Some would have listened in order to be able to pass an opinion on the preacher's ability, some in order to be able to show off their own. Some would have found satisfaction in looking out for caps to fit upon their neighbours' heads. Some would have employed the time in studying the caps and bonnets (literal, not metaphorical) which were on their neighbours' heads already. Some would have fidgeted about their seats as they determined what they should do when service was over, and some have pursued the same train of thought quietly, and comatosely, in an easy position and a snug corner. And some, it is to be hoped, would have listened "to get good," and of these, here and there one, perhaps, would have not only got it, but carried it off.

Heigh ho! sermons and sermonizing! how hard is the whole subject, and how difficult to grapple with amid the rampant sermonolatry—(forgive so barbarous a word!) of the day. Most idols are hideous, but of all the ugly things concocted, whether of or for stocks and stones, nineteenth century sermons are the

ugliest. And never half so ugly as when they drop, like toads in the fairy tale, from the mouth of a popular preacher, so called. O what sermons might be! Alas, what sermons are, and what they will continue to be, so long as the present system prevails.—But all this indiscreet outpouring has flowed from my pen by accident, and I crave the reader's pardon. Only what I have said, comes so entirely from my heart, that I cannot find in my heart to erase it.

Mr. Smith's sermon, to which I revert, would have produced as much effect as an ordinary sermon does on an ordinary occasion. But this occasion was extraordinary. Everybody was wishing to know what the new Curate had got to say for himself, and everybody had been more or less "put out," by finding himself or herself late for Church. It was not a propitious audience. And the circumstances of the case being what they were, the subject of the sermon was not the most fortunate that could have been selected. The merest generalities received a personal application, and poor Mr. Smith perceiving this as he proceeded, grew more and more nervous, looked more and more conscious, tried as he went on to give a softened turn to a sentence or two to which the events of the day gave a sting,—boggled—hesitated, and made

such bad grammar, that his auditors, for the most part, came to the conclusion, that he was extemporizing smooth words into severities, not softening unintentional asperities.

When Mr. Smith quitted the pulpit that morning, his shirt stuck to his back even more uncomfortably than it did in the dining-room at Cumberworth Court. But the dew now was cold and clammy.

However all things come to an end, and so at last Mr. Smith found himself outstretched upon the Crackanthorpe settee in Mrs. Finch's parlour.

Enter Mrs. Finch with a tray, the contents whereof are arranged in the neatest possible order, such order being the result of habit, but in the present instance an injudicious proceeding on the part of Mrs. Finch. She had something to say, and not knowing how to begin, she thought a little rattling of the knives and forks would help to compose her own nerves, and prepare the way for conversation. But the knives and forks were so obviously in their proper places that there was no excuse for moving them at all. I too, as well as Mr. Smith, have occasional need of a tray of provisions—the teatray for instance. And I too have a female to wait upon me, but bless your heart, Mrs. Finch, she beats you hollow! She has long

flapping ears, like a spaniel,—has my little Pitcher, and black beady eyes as sharp as needles. Nothing escapes her. She knows the contents of my letters before I have opened them; from three words dropped in her presence she will raise a tale of the most imposing grandeur, and disseminate it through the village, taking up some small change of gossip from every one she meets before I could have contrived to put on my hat and gloves. But her talent lies especially in the management of her tray. If I happen to have a guest or two in the house, she pitches the teacups and saucers into the tray, anyhow, pops the cream jug into the slop basin, and garnishes the sugar bowl with loose teaspoons. And then, when the tray is set upon the table, she proceeds leisurely to bring order out of chaos. Such rattling of crockery, such jingling of spoons, such placing, and replacing, such marching, and countermarching, that the nervous grow frantic, and the impatient distracted. “That will do, Kitty, thank you!” I exclaim in despair, again and again. Kitty knows better. Nobody else in the room can hear anybody but Kitty; but if there be six people all talking at once, those long ears of Kitty will take in each separate speaker’s tale, and till the story which she is most anxious to hear is finished, the cups

will be rattled, and the teaspoons sent flying from saucer to saucer. Nay, in case of emergency, and when the only thing apparently left her to do, would be to sit down and make tea, or, from sheer bodily exhaustion, to coil herself up in the teatray, and laying her head on the teapot by way of pillow, go to sleep, she will make a sudden rush to the door, and flying back with a hearth-broom and dust-pan, will commence a series of operations at the fire-place, driving the shovel against the back of the chimney with a succession of shocks, grinding cinders against iron, singeing bristles against hot bars, and making the dust to fly in all directions, resolutely, and unrelentingly, until—O happy moment! she has gained the information from the parlour, which she desires to impart to the kitchen.

Mrs. Finch's tray was too tidy. She could do little or nothing with a single plate, and a dish of sandwiches, a decanter of water, and a goblet. She could only set the tray upon the table, and retreat and advance once or twice to see that she had got it into that position which she determined to be mathematically correct. So she stood still a little, and smoothed her apron a little, and coughed a little; but Mr. Smith had got hold of a newspaper, and was deep in a review of one of those remarkable

pamphlets in which it is proved to the satisfaction of the truly pious and consistently liberal, that it is rather nice than otherwise, and certainly advantageous to the cause of morality, that a man should marry his brother's frowzy widow, or vice versâ,—pah !

Mr. Smith read on through the slashing review unconscious of Mrs. Finch's presence, and the impending communication. At length, after three more coughs, she expectorated it, and out it came. "If you please, sir, don't you think I'd better send for the doctor?"

"O I beg your pardon, Mrs. Finch, I did not hear you come into the room. The doctor? Ah, yes, certainly, if you think he can relieve it. I don't know much about such matters myself. I've got Reece and Buchan, though, and I mean to read them. I've noticed that you have a troublesome cough. You think it growing more serious, do you? No pain in your side I hope, no spitting, no night-sweats?"

"Sir?" exclaimed Mrs. Finch in so much astonishment, that the colour rose in Mr. Smith's cheeks under the apprehension that he had said something very improper.

"Your cough, Mrs. Finch, you thought of consulting the doctor about that?"

"For my cough? My cough is nothing. I never notice it. It was on your account, sir,

that I thought of sending for Mr. Sicklemore. I thought how bad you looked this morning. You must feel terribly shaken."

"A doctor for me? terribly shaken? what can you mean, Mrs. Finch?"

"Ah, sir, no doubt you feel your memory rather—rather impaired: well, sir, not exactly impaired, I did not mean to distress you, but not so sharp as usual. I'm sure, sir, there is nothing uncommon in that. When I've one of my sick head-aches I can remember nothing. The last time I had it I sent three letters to the post and forgot to stamp them. When the head is confused, the memory is always affected. And I assure you, sir, as I told Miss Peepy, and Mrs. Prickett, and Miss Cackleby, and maybe a dozen more that made inquiries, that long before I had heard of what happened, or seen you in church, I had remarked a great confusion in your head; and Miss Peepy said that she looked over her blind at you as you went down the church lane last night, and that you seemed very excited, and quite pale. John Dibble went so far as to express his opinion that you didn't know what you were doing from the time you couldn't open the tower-door this morning: but that is just his way: he makes the worst of everything. But I do assure you, sir, that everybody is compassionating you, and

making the greatest allowance for you. Even Mr. Stintagroats that seldom has a kind word for anybody, said as he overtook me, "Poor young man, I'm quite sorry for him : but if I was you, Mrs. Finch, I would get him to try what quiet, and a little cooling medicine will do, before you alarm his friends."

If Mr. Smith sat still and listened to the out-pouring which had at length found vent, it was simply because he was so much puzzled and so aghast, that he began to doubt whether he was awake or dreaming.

"Good gracious, Mrs. Finch !" he exclaimed at last, "what are you talking about?"

"Why, of course, sir," replied the lady in the sort of soothing tone in which she would have addressed a frightened child, "of course I was alluding to your frightful accident yesterday. Not one man in a thousand, sir, would have been so patient. I am quite distressed that you said nothing about it. I am sure I should not have grudged the trouble. I could easily have cut your hair close . . ."

"Cut my hair close !" muttered Mr. Smith.

"And a patch of brown paper soaked in vinegar could have been laid on in a minute."

"Laid on in a minute, Mrs. Finch?"

"Yes, sir, and prevented these unpleasant symptoms."

"Prevented these unpleasant symptoms! Heaven and earth, madam," cried the Curate waxing wrathful, "what do you mean? Are you going out of your senses? or do you think that I have taken leave of mine?"

Mrs. Finch had no longer any doubt on the subject, and her first impulse was to dash out of the room, and lock the lunatic into his apartment: but that would be to leave the Crackanthorpe furniture at his mercy, and he might suspend himself from the curtain-rod with one of his garters, or do some dreadful thing of that kind. So good Mrs. Finch, being a woman of spirit, resolved to face her trial as best she might, and placing the table between herself and the object of her fears, called to mind all she had heard about the influence of the human eye on the deranged, fixed her own (so far as she could, for she had a slight cast in one of them) on the Curate, and very much to the increase of his dismay, proceeded to fascinate him.

"Why don't you answer me?" he inquired impatiently. "There must be some strange mistake. I cannot imagine what you are alluding to."

"Your accident yesterday. It made me turn quite faint when they showed me after church where you had come through the ceiling: and to think of your having said nothing about it!

But no doubt it was the soft hassocks in Sir Tukesbury's pew that saved you !”

The light was beginning to dawn on Mr. Smith's mind. And not unnaturally he burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughing. Moreover, as he laughed loud and long, he rose from his seat, and proceeded to stir the fire.

This was too much. When Mrs. Finch saw him with the poker in his hand, she felt that it was high time to be off, and retreated at once to the door.

“Stop, stop ! I heartily beg your pardon, Mrs. Finch, for not explaining ; but really the whole thing is too absurd. My good madam, it was not I that broke through the belfry floor, but the clock-weight.”

“Yes, sir, but you held on by the rope, and came through too : no doubt the rope helped to break the fall.”

“But Mrs. Finch, I do assure you that I had no fall whatever. I came down the turret stairs.”

“Why 'tis all over Cumberworth that you had a fall of sixty feet and pitched with your head on a hassock. Some say you was found insensible, and others that you was in a kind of a dwam, reading the Thirty-nine Articles ; but for that matter, the one would be to my thinking as bad as the other. Are you quite certain

that you had no fall, sir?" inquired Mrs. Finch, with a gradual restoration of confidence.

"Quite," was the laughing reply.

"You'll excuse me, sir, but it is a serious matter: to what cause do you attribute the—the—failure in your memory, and the confusion in your head?"

"My good madam, I have neither the one nor the other. I am as well to-day as ever I was in my life; only rather tired, and in want of my luncheon."

Mrs. Finch was confounded. Crazy he was not. Sick he was not.

"Then you must excuse me, sir, but what in the world was the cause of your commencing the service without a congregation, and preaching your sermon as if—as if you had got the spasms?"

To see ourselves as others see us is, incontestably, a very wholesome discipline, although the process has seldom much in it which is altogether pleasurable. It is better to endure the shock of gazing at oneself through the medium of an unbecoming, or even distorting looking-glass, than to go out to dinner with a dirty face.

And so Mr. Smith, like a good man as he was, though not particularly exhilarated by Mrs. Finch's interrogatory, felt it a matter of conscience to make the best of it.

"Well, really," he replied, "things have turned out rather unfortunately. They could not ring the bells; and the clock was not going: and it would seem as if there was a good deal of difference between Cumberworth time, and London time. My watch always goes right, and so under the circumstances, I thought it best to go by that. A person in my position, Mrs. Finch, should always be punctual, never after the time."

"Mr. Blandy, sir (and everybody knows what a wise man Mr. Blandy is), used to say that folks that are before the time are as unpunctual as those that are after it."

"Hang Mr. Blandy!" thought the Curate to himself. "Why is that man always to be cast into my teeth?" But he controlled himself, and replied: "Very true, Mrs. Finch. And I waited ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, though I knew it was past eleven, in hopes of the arrival of the congregation. But I could not wait for ever."

"And the sermon, sir," continued the persevering Mrs. Finch; "I'm sure you weren't well in the pulpit. Everybody noticed how you boggled, and changed colour from white to red, and from red to white, at almost every sentence. You had a touch of the spasms, sir?"

"Not I," replied the Curate manfully.

“Ah, well, sir, then perhaps it was your youth, and natural timidity: you will get used to us by and by; and meanwhile folks must make allowance.”

This was the unkindest cut of all. Like the boy who cannot endure to be reminded of jackets and pinafores, Mr. Smith was still too young to be able to rejoice in his youth. A suggestion of youth seemed to him very like an imputation of incapacity. And as for timidity, had he not come to Cumberworth prepared to grapple with evil in every shape, and to show himself a dauntless reformer of all abuses? Young and timid! The words sounded to you like an insult, Mr. Smith. You are wiser now.

And even as it was, you submitted to a disappointment with very commendable patience; for in your heart of hearts you had quite expected that your sermon would produce a sensation. Something within (with all due respect for that worthy old tinker, John Bunyan, I am by no means sure that it was the devil), had told you that it was a good one. At Rugby, and Christ Church, and among the students of the Theological College, you had been held to be a crack hand at literary composition. You had a quiet conviction that you could do great things in the pulpit. And here, at the very outset of your labours, a dry spinster in an out-

of-the-way village, was proceeding to extinguish you!

Well, but after all, it was your manner, not your matter, which had called forth her apologetic condolences. So there was still comfort for you.

Perhaps the reader will think that Mr. Smith ought to have been quite above caring what his congregation, or any portion of it, thought of his first sermon at Cumberworth. Very possibly: but if so, the reader has never been in a pulpit, or must be a very "cold-blooded reptile" indeed. People may pretend what they like; but never man preached his first sermon yet that was utterly indifferent as to what those who heard it thought of it. Why should he be indifferent? If he were, it is my deliberate opinion that he has no business in a pulpit at all.

Mr. Smith, at any rate, had no such apathy.

"No, I had no spasms, Mrs. Finch. I am sorry to find that the hesitation in my delivery was so considerable as to be noticed. I was not altogether comfortable, but I shall be more at my ease hereafter. And I hope that, apart from my manner, the sermon itself was of a kind to be useful. Do you happen to know, Mrs. Finch, whether the sermon itself was liked?"

"Well, sir, I didn't hear any complaints, except that they said you never raised your eyes from your book; and our Mr. Gibson contrives to make each person in the Church feel that what is said, is said to him individually."

"Is Mr. Gibson such a good preacher, then?"

"Why, sir, there's no one like him for miles round! He is a fortunate man that gets listened to in the evening after Mr. Gibson has been heard in the morning. Most preachers seem poor sticks after Mr. Gibson. We know what good preachers are, here at Cumberworth. Dear, dear, what a preacher was Mr. Blandy! Why, I could have sat and listened to him for hours together. We shall never hear the like of him again! You'll excuse me, sir, for saying so much, and making so free; but you asked me a question. And you have no cause to be discouraged. You are but young, sir, and timidity is natural, sir; and a grace in youth. And perhaps when you have lived as long, and preached as much as Mr. Gibson, and Mr. Blandy, those that are alive to hear you, and have never heard them, will think much of you. But even if they shouldn't, you can but do your best. It isn't every one that has the gift to get himself listened to."

"Thank you, Mrs. Finch, I may as well eat my luncheon."

And Mrs. Finch departing, Mr. Smith ate his luncheon with such appetite as he had. And then he finished reading his review, and was proceeding to look over his sermon for the afternoon, when suddenly the sound of the Church-bells struck his ear.

"Come, they have made their way into the belfry at last, and we shall have no mistakes this evening. The congregation will not keep me waiting for them." And with this, Mr. Smith drew out his watch, and looking at it, laid it on the table. "Plenty of time, I see," said he to himself, and he proceeded with the leisurely reading of his sermon.—Mrs. Finch removed the luncheon, and inquired whether she should wait in the house till he left it? "No, thank you, ma'am. If you'll leave the key in the door, I'll take good care to lock it, as I come out." Mrs. Finch seemed hardly satisfied, but seeing no help for it, and being anxious to have a few words of explanation with her dear friend Miss Peepy before service, took herself off.

Mr. Smith finished his sermon, laid it down on the table, and was in the act of removing the morning sermon from his sermon-case, and substituting that for the afternoon, when his ear caught a change in the sound of the bells; or rather, he heard one bell instead of six. He

glanced at his watch ; and then opened the window ; then glanced at his watch again. " Half-an-hour to Church time ! What a very odd way they have of ringing the bells here ! Really, if it wasn't so early, I should have thought that that was the bell which is commonly rung five minutes before the hour strikes. I suppose they will chime again, by and by."

No, no chimes, only tinkle, tinkle, tinkle.

By and by the little bell ceased altogether.

Now then for the chimes.

No such thing ! The little bell renews its tinkle, and Mr. Smith, taking up his book, reads on placidly for ten minutes or so, when he is disturbed by a hasty rapping at the door, and John Dibble enters, looking wilder than ever.

" Oh, sir ! didn't you hear the bell ? Don't you know what o'clock it is ? Why, sir, the congregation have been all in their seats these twenty minutes. It is long past three. It struck three when the little bell began !"

" Past three !" ejaculated Mr. Smith. " Not by London time, I can tell you !"

And snatching his watch off the table, he looked at it once more. The hands were in the same position as when he looked at them half-an-hour before. Neither minute hand, nor hour hand had stirred since.

The infallible watch,—the watch that never

went wrong,—the watch that was to be the standard of reference to every recorder of time in Cumberworth, from the clock on the steeple to the ancient turnip in ploughboy's fob,—the watch which had been the precious gift of Mr. Smyth Smythe Smith, of Smithfield, Smithwick, and the Smithies, had struck work altogether.

It had stopped !

Mr. Smith said not a word : he gazed at it frantically, applied his ear to it desperately, and laid it down on the table dismally. Then seizing his hat, and his sermon-case, dashed out of the house, of course forgetting to lock the door behind him.

Reader ! did you ever attempt to officiate in Church when you had little or no breath in your body ? If you haven't, I have ; and I can tell you that of all asphyxiating miseries it is the worst. Before Mr. Smith had got to the end of the general exhortation, he was gasping so portentously, that he was obliged to stop short. But his breath came none the better, and his heart only beat the more. Worse still, the congregation looked more as if it was amused, than as if it was sympathising. And an irresistible impulse made the Prayer Book slip off the desk with a jerk that dislodged the old strips of card that had been used for time

immemorial as place-keepers; and when they fell out, Mr. Smith could not recall with any certainty the day of the month. It was like a bad dream. There was a haze before his eyes, and a dizzy, bumping sensation about his temples, which so confused him, that he could not be positive, as he was reading the second lesson, whether he had not omitted the first. To be sure, he had really made no mistakes, but his internal perturbation was none the less; and so it fell out that he actually did commence saying the second collect at morning-prayer, before he remembered that the service was evensong. And this so thoroughly discomposed him, that he never noticed the antiquity of his Prayer Book; and accordingly, to the immeasurable amazement of the congregation, and to the satisfaction of good Madam Beccles, proceeded mechanically, and as a matter of course, to offer intercessions on behalf of our "most gracious Sovereign Lord King George,"—"our gracious Queen Charlotte,"—"their Royal Highnesses George Prince of Wales" and "the Princess of Wales," with the rest of the Royal family.

But even this was not the worst; for when our unfortunate hero found himself in the pulpit, and laying his sermon-case on the velvet cushion, unfolded the first page of his discourse,

what was his dismay at discovering that he had not completed his interrupted intention of substituting the afternoon's sermon for that of the morning, and that the old text of "a time for every purpose, and for every work," was still staring him in the face !

What should he,—or rather, poor man, what could he do ? The last verse of the hymn was being sung before the discovery was made. It was too late to send up to his lodgings: the congregation had been kept waiting once already. He had never preached extempore in his life, and in the present confusion of his nerves such an attempt would only end in a break down. He had nothing for it but to end the service abruptly, or to re-deliver his sermon for the morning. He chose the latter, and preached with the comfortable conviction that with every fresh sentence he uttered his audience would be more and more convinced that his brain was affected by the accident of yesterday, or that he was commencing his ministry at Cumberworth with the deliberate intention of affronting its whole population.

The sermon ended, Mr. Smith retired to the vestry, and waiting till every body had left the Church, crept home in a state of distress which could hardly have been greater, if he had had some grave moral delinquency on his conscience.

He was so thoroughly wretched, that his annoyance seemed hardly capable of aggravation.

And yet it was; for as he approached his lodgings, the first object he saw was Mrs. Finch with the key of the house door in her hand, looking in at his sitting-room window. The promise that he had given rushed into his mind, and with it the misgiving that, in his hurry to get to the Church, he had left his window wide open, and neglected to lock the door.

He hastened onward to give his explanation, and make his apology. Mrs. Finch was looking as if she had been turned into stone herself, and intended to spread the infection among all that came in her way.

"I hope . . . I mean, I am afraid, Mrs. Finch . . . has anything happened? I beg your pardon. What is the matter?"

"Sir," was the reply to these incoherences, "it is no one's fault but my own. I ought to have known better. But being so long used to Mr. Blandy, and always accustomed to find him as good as his word, I really thought I could have trusted you to lock the door, especially as you knew how much of Mrs. Crackanthorpe's valuable property there was in the house. But of course it will be a lesson to me. People that abuse privileges cannot expect to preserve them. I must keep my own keys,

sir; and always, sir, both of the house-door, and everything else."

"Good gracious, Mrs. Finch, I hope your house has not been robbed?"

"I hope not, sir."

"I'm sure if it has, I shall be most ready to make up the loss."

"Of course, sir. But there are things that money cannot replace. Anything, for instance, that belonged to my late lamented mistress, Mrs. Crackanthorpe . . ."

"But has the house been robbed? What have you lost?"

"So far as I know, sir, I have lost nothing. You'll excuse me, sir, but having some misgiving as to your being fit to be trusted, I locked the kitchen door, and the pantry, and the bedroom doors before I left the house, so there was only the passage, and the sitting-room that was easy of access. Have *you* lost nothing, sir? I see the umbrella is not in the passage, nor your cloak; but perhaps you took them with you to Church?"

"No, indeed, I did not. If they have disappeared, it serves me right. I am glad the loss has only fallen on myself. 'Tis well it is no worse."

"Are you sure it is no worse, sir? Your sitting-room window was open."

"Well, there was nothing there but your furniture, and my books; and books are seldom stolen."

"You had better look," said Mrs. Finch, leading the way.

"Ah! I see how it was done," she continued, pointing to the mark of muddy shoes on the window-cill, and on the carpet. "Some of the tramps that have been swarming about the village ever since that day at Kettleby, saw the window open, and jumped in. There's the villain's footsteps, and O, sir! as I'm a Christian woman, if he hasn't knocked over the flower-pot that had Mrs. Crackanthorpe's favourite Fuchsia in it, 'Trinkle's Tower of glory,'—and there it lies on the gravel, trampled all to pieces. O my poor Fuchsia!"

But even in her lament over the fuchsia, Mrs. Finch was fain to look round as a yet more dismal ejaculation was uttered by her lodger.

"O dear, dear! what shall I do? I left my watch upon the table; and it is gone!"

It was even so. A tramp peering about in search of unprotected property, had seen the prize through the open window; had jumped in, and secured it.

The watch was gone for ever!

CHAPTER XII.

DEAR-BOUGHT EXPERIENCE.

" Duke. How dost thou, my good fellow ?

" Clown. Truly, sir, the better for my foes, and the worse for my friends.

" Duke. Just the contrary; the better for thy friends.

" Clown. No, sir, the worse.

" Duke. How can that be ?

" Clown. Marry, sir, they praise me, and make an ass of me ; now my foes tell me plainly, I am an ass ; so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself ; and by my friends I am abused : so that, conclusions to be as kisses, if your four negatives make your two affirmatives, why, then the worse for my friends, and the better for my foes."

Twelfth Night.

WHEN Mr. Smith woke on the following morning, he was very well content to hear the chiming quarters of the old church clock, and to submit to be guided through the day by its sound. Youth is buoyant, and with rest comes refreshment, but I cannot take upon myself to say that as the worthy Curate looked through the mist and mizzle to the duck-weed-covered

pond, and dead wall that bounded the prospect from his bed-chamber window, he had any apprehension that his spirits would run away with him. The dismal dripping of that autumnal morning, and its wreaths of fog making all nature limp and dank, were the types of the depressing influences which clung to him like a wet blanket. He tried to look on himself as a counterpart to one of the heroes of ancient tragedy, pursued by inexorable Fate, and victimized for no faults of his own; but somehow or other the comparison broke down. He was too honest and too true to be blinded to any great extent by self-deceit. And though in the events of the last few days very much had occurred which looked like a concatenation of mishaps which might have occurred to any one at any time through no fault of their own, still the more he reflected, the more his misgivings ripened into conviction that his vexations were the legitimate consequences of his own actions.

Good, therefore, was already working out of evil. His self-reliance had had a shock so severe, that he began to feel glad that he was to be associated in parish work with an older man than himself, and to find satisfaction in the thought that "there was old Gibson to refer to."

By the time he was ten years older, he had prepared himself for directing others by having learned to prefer obedience to command: but for the present, with his head full of schemes of usefulness which he was eager to carry out unchecked, and of experiments to be tried, which no one, as it seemed to him, had studied so earnestly as himself, he was only dimly feeling after truths which are only thoroughly learnt, perhaps, by long-continued exposure to opposition and disappointment,—namely, that we never do so well as when we have not our own way, and that the happiness of those who govern is infinitely less than that of those who are governed.

“The long and the short of the matter is, that old Gibson knew me better than I knew myself. He saw I was burning to make a fool of myself, and so he contrived to let me have full swing, but only in a matter wherein I couldn’t do much mischief. Well, it was very friendly of him. And it has done me a world of good,—a world *more* good, than if he had only given me a long yarn of prosy advice about tempering my zeal with discretion. And so the sooner I go and tell him so, and thank him, the better.”

And with that intent, though there was now a drenching rain, though cloak and umbrella

had disappeared, and Mrs. Finch was too prudent to risk the loss of the late lamented Crackanthorpe's parapluie by offering the loan of it to such an unthrifty gentleman, Mr. Smith proceeded before noon to the Rectory.

But the parson of Cumberworth was still no better, and even Mrs. Gibson was not to be seen. And so Tuesday passed, and Wednesday, and Thursday. And very dull, comfortless days Mr. Smith found them, being only interspersed with occasional visits from Mrs. Finch (who did not fail to apprise him of the various remarks which were made in the village on the events of Sunday) and from the Superintendent of Police at Kettleby, whose hopes of regaining the lost watch grew, from day to day, "fine by degrees, and beautifully less."

On Friday came a summons from Mr. Gibson. And when it arrived, Mr. Smith almost wondered at the pleased alacrity with which he answered it, and he reflected as he went along, why it was that he should feel so much drawn towards a man who had, in fact, given him rope enough to hang himself.

There were hearty greetings on both sides, and then with an amused and mischievous glance which augured well for a speedy return to convalescence, the invalid drew a letter from under his pillow, and said, "Mr. Smith, I have had a

communication about you, which, perhaps, we had better answer together."

"About me, sir?"

"Yes, from the Bishop. Take it, and read it."

Mr. Smith looked rather blank, and opening the envelope, read as follows :

" St. Stephen's, September 15.

" MY DEAR GIBSON,

" The inclosed reached me this morning : let me have a line in explanation, and believe me always

" Very faithfully yours,

" GEORGE ST. STEPHEN'S."

" (Inclosure.)

" Custom House, London, September 14.

" MY LORD,

" There are strange doings at Cumberworth, in your Lordship's diocese, which are very distressing to true Protestants, and rapidly alienating the affections of the people. The new Curate on Sunday last was not only half an hour late for service, but he preached a sermon which seemed aimed at several respectable members of the congregation, and moreover he actually denied the Queen's supremacy, and offered up prayers for the dead. A word from your Lordship to the Rector of Cumberworth

will no doubt put an end to these highly objectionable practices.

"I remain, my Lord,

"Yours respectfully,

"TIMOTHY PECK."

"Well, Mr. Smith," asked the Rector, "what do you think of that?"

"I am really very sorry to have caused so much trouble. I came here on Monday to tell you what a fool I had made of myself, but you were not well enough to see me."

"You plead guilty, then, do you?"

"I was half an hour, or at least twenty minutes late, through the stopping of my watch; and I was conscious as I preached my sermon, which, as I dare say you know, I preached twice over, that there was an awkwardness in some of the sentences that referred to people being late for church, for, in the morning two-thirds of the congregation were late."

"Well, well, I know all about that: these are accidents easily explainable: but our Protestantism is in peril, and our loyalty is questioned. You hear what charges Mr. Peck brings against you?"

"Who is Mr. Peck?"

"Never mind about that. What is your reply to his charge?"

"Why, really, sir, I am at a loss how to reply. Of course, I deny it *in toto*: but I can't conceive what he can mean by such a gratuitous assertion."

"Are you sure it is gratuitous? For my own part, Mr. Smith (and I have taken some trouble to inquire), I believe the gentleman says no more than the truth."

Mr. Gibson's words were going one way, and his features another. So there was nothing for it but to apprise the bewildered Curate that he had not only omitted all mention of Queen Victoria, but had appeared to recognize another sovereign; had not only omitted all intercession for existing royalties, but had invoked the blessing of Heaven on folks who had been in their graves these thirty years!

Mr. Smith learned his delinquency for the first time. He had been utterly unconscious of the *lapsus lingue*; and I am ashamed to say—(let us hope the *Record* may never have its pious soul vexed by hearing of such enormities!) the effect produced was a peal of laughter, which was re-echoed by Mr. Gibson. From that moment the Rector and Curate understood each other, and worked together as brothers.

"But who is Mr. Peck?" inquired Mr. Smith once more. "Is he a parishioner?"

"O dear no!"

"Was he present, and felt himself attacked by my sermon?"

"O dear no!"

"He heard my unlucky slip about King George and Queen Charlotte?"

"O dear no. I understand that he was two hundred miles away from Cumberworth last Sunday. But what does that matter? gentlemen of his class are not scrupulous. The end sanctifies the means. Zeal (not charity) covers the multitude of sins."

"My good sir, excuse me, but you have not yet told me who Mr. Peck is. Did you ever see him?"

"They tell me I have; that Sir Tukesbury's housekeeper brought a lank, tallow-faced youth here as a candidate for the schoolmaster's place; and that I, not liking his looks or his manner, dismissed him curtly: that the housekeeper was sorely offended, and has been nursing wrath ever since. Sir Tukesbury got the young man a clerkship in the Custom House; and upon receiving a letter from his worthy aunt here, with a description of your mishaps on Sunday, the pious gentleman pens the epistle to the Bishop which you have just read. I would give two-pence to see the Bishop's reply to him when he gets our explanation! But such, in ninety instances out of the hundred, are the motives that

prompt to the 'awful disclosures' which scandalize the 'religious world,' the garbage on which the *Record* and such like papers fatten themselves, and which animate that class of 'pious ladies,' who, with all due allowance for ignorance and infirmity, are the most venomous mischief-makers in the world. 'Furens quid fœmina possit' is a very ugly item in clerical experience now-a-days. The art of agitation is better understood in the nineteenth century than it was in the days of Queen Dido; and for anything I see to the contrary, the Christianity of a thorough-going partisan of our times may be set down as something more unscrupulous and spiteful than anything that could be found in old heathendom."

"Well, Mr. Gibson, these good folks have made the most of a little: but for all that, I see clearly that I have been very foolish. The mischiefs that have resulted may be of no great consequence in themselves, and I have myself received the greatest amount of damage, but if I had not been so self-satisfied, and so obstinate in maintaining my opinion, not one of the various mishaps of last week would have occurred. I have not the smallest doubt now that my poor lost watch was going wrong during the whole time that I was endeavouring to make it a law to the whole parish. I am quite ashamed of

myself, and I feel that I have made such a bad beginning here, that I shall make no progress. You had better get rid of me."

"Tut, man! you are rushing off into another extreme. You will do better where you are than anywhere else: and besides, you wouldn't leave me in my present helpless condition, would you? or shrink from facing the difficulties (if such they should prove) which you have yourself created? But, at the worst, what has happened? There has been some little damage to the belfry floor, some injury to the lock of the turret, in which I understand some pebbles have been found, (a circumstance which seems to excuse *you* from any share in that delinquency, at least); and lastly, (which I much regret,) some property of your own has been lost. You were a little too soon for one service, a little too late for another; made a few mistakes in the prayers, and delivered, what seems to have been a useful sermon enough, twice over. But these things are all explainable, and are not likely to occur again. They have produced some hearty laughter at your expense, no doubt. And I should think the Bishop's laugh, when our explanation detrudes Mr. Timothy Peck from the sublime to the ridiculous, will be the heartiest of all. In a month's time all will be forgotten. The people

will have seen you in that which I am very sure is your true character, and will begin to prize you accordingly. And since good is always working out of evil, the incidents which have occurred will probably have the effect of making you more watchful to avoid errors into which your natural temperament would otherwise lead you."

"My dear sir, you are a great deal too patient with my folly: and I am all the more ashamed of myself because I see clearly enough now, that while I came here full of myself and my own importance, and thinking scorn of what I ought to have admired, you saw through me at once, and instead of being offended, contrived to save me from egregious blunders, by setting me to try my hand in a field wherein I could not, it is true, do a great deal of mischief, but in which I accomplished as much as could be effected in the time."

"Well, Mr. Smith, I did by you as I would be done by,—as an elder is bound to do by a younger brother. The connection of Rector and Curate is a very happy one, if only both parties will be content to respect each other, and to bear and forbear. Our lot has been cast by Providence in days of no ordinary difficulty, in which

'— hard words, jealousies, and fears,
Set folks together by the ears.'

Now, under such circumstances, it is not likely that a Curate and Rector will be brought together who differ widely on controverted points; and therefore, in this respect, there may be no call for forbearance on either side. But in spite of agreement in what both look upon as essentials, there must be many points of detail in which each will have his own opinion. In such cases the call for forbearance is urgent. Where two cannot agree, at least they can be silent, and give each other credit for sincerity. And Rector though I am, I must say, that in non-essentials, if any yielding be necessary, such yielding is to be expected from the person who has the lesser share of responsibility, and who ordinarily is the younger and the least experienced. It is true, and I thank God for it, that the rising race of Curates are men who have had far better education, and been far better trained, than was the case with old fellows like me. But still we have had long years of experience, (for the most part dearly bought,) and perhaps we are not less in earnest, or less eager for the salvation of souls, than those who, when they succeed us, will do more good (I doubt not, and I heartily pray God that it may be so) than we have done. And therefore, while fully aware that most of us old incumbents may learn much from our juniors, we have a right to claim more consideration at their

hands than is often shown. Newspapers only pourtray Curates as an ill-paid race, snubbed and trodden under foot by their employers; but is it rare to find Curates who systematically exalt themselves by denying the labours, and wisdom, and piety of those with whom they ought to be in brotherly co-operation, and whom they ought to help, rather than hinder? Is it a rare thing to find a Curate setting up a separate interest in the parish? Is it even rare to find a Curate who has money, "stealing the hearts of Israel" therewith, and thus, as it were, by his charities, or his parochial munificence, outbidding the Parish Priest in the affections of his people? There is but one way in which, so far as I can see, we can faithfully discharge our duties towards each other, towards the Church, and towards the Church's LORD; and that is by the fixed determination to forget self,—by the daily sacrifice of self, in order that thereby we may show more love to the brethren, and more devotion to Him, Whose servants we are:—

“ ‘O’ may ‘we all our lineage prove,
Give and forgive, do good and love,
By soft endearments in kind strife
Lightening the load of daily life!

“ ‘There is much need: for not as yet
Are we in shelter or repose,

The Holy House is still beset
With leaguer of stern foes ;
Wild thoughts within, bad men without,
All evil spirits round about,
Are banded in unblest device,
To spoil Love's earthly paradise.

“ ‘Then draw we nearer day by day,
Each to his brethren, all to GOD ;
Let the world take us as she may,
We must not change our road ;
Not wondering, though in grief, to find
The Martyr's foe still keep her mind ;
But fix'd to hold Love's banner fast,
And by submission win at last.’ ”

The Vicar of Roost.

"O, what a world of vile ill-favour'd faults

Look handsome in three hundred pounds a year!"

The Merry Wives of Windsor.

The Vicar of Roost.

CHAPTER I.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT.

"I would not change it. Happy is your Grace
That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style!"

As you like it.

I HAVE often heard it said that there are very few men in the world who are strong-minded enough to be fit to write a diary of their daily lives. I am sure that I am not one of the few, for I see clearly that strength of mind is no quality of mine.

I see the danger there is of self-deception; of hiding one's bad, paltry motives; of making one's self seem good upon paper, and depicting, not what one is, but what one ought to be. I see what an encouragement a journal gives to morbid, over-sensitive feelings, and to habits of

unhealthy self-contemplation. So I will not write a journal, but only jot down from time to time such things as seem most likely to keep me humble; my mistakes, failures, errors in judgment, and the like.

And let me note here that what I write here is for nobody's eyes but my own. I know it is of no use inscribing the words "To be burnt unread" at the head of this page, for all experience shows that the documents so labelled are those which are preserved the longest; but I do make it my special request to those into whose hands this book may hereafter fall, that they will take care that no stranger "intermeddles" with it. I have known journals as private as this actually set up in print, and published. Such atrocious breaches of confidence make one blush for human nature.¹ But I am using too strong language, and had better

¹ Some Editors of the old school would have thought it expedient to suppress this amiable protest of shrinking modesty, as implying a condemnation of their own proceedings. We have no such squeamishness. It is now a well-established principle of literary morality that the private papers of deceased persons are the property of the public. During the last few years, half a score at least of journals have been published which were never intended to see the light (all the more interesting on that account!) and which, in the opinion of our over-conscientious seniors, ought, from that very circumstance, to have been withheld altogether. But such strait-

look at my own misdoings. I believe that I am at this present time a good deal dispirited and discouraged: and these seem to me additional reasons why I should make occasional memoranda. A record of the many causes which I have for thankfulness, will, I should hope, as my mind becomes better regulated, help to make me uniformly cheerful and contented; and with respect to the discouragements of my present position, I see clearly that they ought not to weigh too heavily. As time goes on, I trust I shall do better, and then things will wear a brighter aspect. Meanwhile, I may, I think, without risk, take comfort from the recollection

laced theories of honour are not in accordance with the liberal sentiments of our time. The footman and the housemaid have no scruple in reading the letters which we have accidentally left open upon our table. Why then should an intelligent public be debarred from perusing in their full integrity the diaries of their defunct cotemporaries? If folks do not mean to have the chronicles of their secret thoughts exposed, they should burn them. If they are too careless to do this, they must take the consequences. "Reverence for the expressed wishes of the deceased," and "delicacy towards survivors," are phrases which are quite unsuited to an inquiring age like the present, and the sooner they are got rid of the better. The public appetite for excitement must be catered for; and literary remains have a money value. The end justifies the means.

Fortified by these considerations, we put forth the journal which the reader holds in his hands, without compunction, and without retrenchment.—EDITOR.

that it is not as if I had not had other prospects till within the last few years. The luxury in which I was brought up was not a good school of training for my present life. I trust I am safer now than I was then. And as every day convinces me more and more that the change in our fortunes was for the best, so I hope to find, as time goes on, that I am adapting myself more and more to that state of life to which I have now been called. I am a poor creature at present, but if I work on, and do not lose heart, I shall do better; I know I shall, if I diligently seek God's help.

And yet what a change it is! Five years ago I was the young squire of Verdon Hall; and I do believe that it was my dear father's over-anxiety that his only child should be the heir of great possessions which was the proximate cause of our ruin. At least there was no other obvious reason why he should have connected himself with that miserable bank. People cruelly blamed his imprudence when all was lost; it was easy enough to do that; but where was the imprudence?

Men, whom he had known for years when he was a merchant himself, and whom he had always found upright and honourable, were among the Directors. They sought him in his retirement, and urged him to cast in his lot with

them. I cannot persuade myself that they had the remotest intention of injuring him. I will not allow myself to doubt that they believed that in spite of present difficulties the Bank would retrieve its fortunes. They wanted a command of capital for immediate purposes, and so naturally turned to my father: they were heavily pressed by urgent claims, and so thought too much of the present, and too little of the future, too much of themselves and too little of him. It was wrong, but I am sure it does not behove me to condemn any one for selfishness: I have a great deal too much of it in my own composition. I never could understand how it was that six months before the Bank stopped payment the Directors reported a balance of fifteen thousand pounds as having been paid to a Reserve fund, when there was no such fund in existence; nor how they could speak of a capital of three millions when that capital was gone; nor how they could announce a dividend of ten per cent upon profits, which had been all loss. But then I never can understand these complicated matters of business, and accounts always distract me.

Yet one thing is clear enough: that statement kept up the value of the Bank shares: and it was on the strength of that statement that my poor father invested every shilling he

had in the world, and I fear even more than he could call his own, in that Bank.

All is ordered for the best : and so I try not to wish that the catastrophe had occurred two days later : for if it had, he would never have known it. O the dreariness of that dark November day, when he received the news ! and the misery of hearing him insist on going out alone to grapple with his difficulties amid the howling of the rising storm ! And the deepening twilight, and then the drifting snow, and then pitchy darkness, and still no sound of his footsteps ! And the sending out servants to look for him, and their cold, blank, uneasy, faces when no trace of him could be found ! And, woe upon woe, when my dear sweet mother heard a whistle which she thought was his, her throwing open the conservatory door, rushing down the stone steps leading to the flower garden, missing her footing in the snow, and getting that terrible fall which injured her spine for ever, and has left her a paralyzed, bed-ridden cripple ever since !

And last of all, that awful morrow, when faithful Neptune dashed into the Mere, and brought to shore the walking-stick which he saw floating on the water, and recognized, alas ! alas ! but too well !

“Found drowned.” It was a verdict that

never satisfied me. *Of course*, absorbed as he was with the overwhelming intelligence of the morning, he had failed to notice his approach to the water's edge, and had fallen in. Perhaps he was blinded with the density of the falling snow ;—perhaps he lost his way in the dusk ;—perhaps,—but it is no use speculating. It was an accident. It *could* be nothing else. Why should any one have felt a doubt on the subject, when his wife and his son felt none?

It is a merciful arrangement on the part of that Providence Which never lays on us more than we are able to bear, that a great trouble absorbs all minor distresses, or at any rate makes us less sensible of their presence. Poor old Verdon Hall! I loved you well. You had been the home of a happy childhood ; and you were as much to me as though you had been in the possession of my ancestors for centuries, instead of the recent purchase of one who had been the maker of his own fortunes ! but after the bitter tragedy which had befallen us within your precincts, I never could have loved you as a home again ! It was almost without a pang that I turned my back on you for ever ! And with my poor mother in the terrible condition to which she was reduced, it was a positive relief to be free from the cares of an establishment. With nothing but our clothes, and my

poor father's picture, and perhaps a score of books, we were to make a new start in life ; for my mother had insisted on surrendering everything which had been settled on herself, and which no creditor could touch. Not a word of complaint ever escaped her. In patience she possessed her soul. What an example she has been to me ! What a blessing has her silent teaching been ! And how ashamed of myself I have need to be when I allow myself to be ruffled, as I so often am, by the petty trials and humiliations to which I am exposed !

The creditors were so touched by my mother's noble conduct that they wished her to retain a hundred a year : but she calculated that for the present we could live on seventy, and that sum was all she would accept. "She was sure," she said, "that if we acted conscientiously, Providence would give us all needful aid : we had enough for food and raiment, and with that we might well be content : the fewer our wants the richer we should find ourselves. When real need should arise, God would provide." And the instincts of her simple faith told her the truth. For a year and a half after our removal from Verdon her health was in so precarious a state, her departure seemed so frequently to be close at hand, that I hardly left her bedside, but when her malady assumed its

present chronic form, it became obvious that I must begin to think of doing something for myself, and it was mercifully ordered that cousin Mary could come and take my place, and nurse my dear mother. She was an orphan, and as poor as ourselves, so was well content to find a mother, and share our fortunes.

But what was I to do? We had fallen into the shade, and were being rapidly forgotten. Relations we had almost none, and there was no person on whose helping hand we had any claim. I hope and believe that I was prepared to engage in any occupation which would afford me an honest livelihood; but it seemed a pity not to turn to account such education as I had already received. My inclination and habits would have made me seek admission into Holy Orders; but how were the needful funds to be found which should enable me to take up my residence at the University, or to defray the cost of some humbler sphere of theological training? Often as I repeated to myself the old saw, which applied so closely to my own condition,—

“When lands are gone, and money spent,
Then learning is most excellent,”

I could only come to the conclusion that the learning must be gotten before the day of des-

titution arrives ; that unless there are lands or money to provide for the cost of its acquisition, it was hardly to be attained—at least here, in costly England. Could I obtain a servitor's or sizar's place, I should be well content. I had determined to enter into a close compact with Humiliation, and to see nothing in her but a staunch friend. And such, "stern, rugged nurse" though she be, I have ever found her. But there seemed no opening even for such an entrance to the course of Academic study as that which was now the object of my ambition ; and I was already seeking a clerk's situation in a tradesman's establishment, where, in the days of our prosperity, my father had spent hundreds yearly, when an event occurred which showed how tenderly Providence was watching over us, and verified the wisdom of the proverb which speaks in various forms the experience of ages, "When bale is next, boot is next ;" "when things are at the worst, they will soon mend." The old housekeeper at Verdon, who, at the time the establishment was broken up, seemed harder and more unsympathising than any other member of our household, died, and bequeathed to my mother "the savings she had made while in her honoured mistress's service,"—a legacy of Five Hundred Pounds. It turned out that she had no connections who could be held to have a prior claim ;

and so with a safe conscience we came into possession of a sum which would cover the expenses of my career at the University.

What happy days were those! too happy, I am convinced, for one who needs as much bracing discipline as I do! And so it was well that I did not succeed in that trial for the fellowship. I see it clearly now. I should have grown indolent and selfish in the years that would have elapsed before a College living fell to my option; and most likely my motives in aiming at a fellowship, had more of worldly ambition in them than of any higher or better qualities; though I persuaded myself that my great object was, to be able to improve my poor mother's income; to find for her more comforts than she has at present, and to provide her ultimately with a home, in which we should be happy together once more. Well, the failure was a terrible disappointment; and yet it has been the means of raising up friends. It led our kind old Provost to inquire more closely into my circumstances and prospects; and his too favourable opinion of me induced him to recommend me to General Harley as private tutor to Harry. And I am sure that that has been one of the most fortunate circumstances of my life; for a more affectionate, kind-hearted creature than Harry does not exist, and

he has shown a wonderful amount of patience towards his "Controller-general" as he chooses to call me. I dare say I have often controlled him needlessly, but how can one help being anxious about a light-hearted lad at the most dangerous age? But I am sure Harry loves me dearly; and though I could not make up my mind to put the seas between my mother and myself, in order to go abroad with him; and though the General was angry with me, it has made no difference in Harry: and it was owing to him, more than to any one else, that I got this Curacy. Poor fellow! he declared that I was the only person who could keep him out of scrapes, and that he should be sure to go to the dogs if I was not within hail. But that was only his random, joking, way of talking: he was not doing himself justice. His real object was, to obtain some provision for me at once, so that I should not be without an income when I ceased to be his tutor. He had a notion in his head that I was too humble (alas! he little knows me!) to be able to fight my own battles, and take what he used to call, "my proper place in the world," not seeing, in his kindness of nature, that the position into which a man naturally subsides, is his proper place. And so he would call me his cripple, and declare that his business must be to push me into the pool.

Yet when I had closed with Mr. Soaper's offer, Harry was so vexed with me, that he protested that I was not fit to take care of myself. "Soaper is a regular old screw !" he exclaimed, "and his wife a regular old *screwess*. Eighty pounds a year ! why, my father gave you a hundred : and little enough too !"

"The General, in his liberality, gave me more than my services were worth, Harry : Mr. Soaper rates them more nearly at their value. And besides, I have a lodging at the school-house rent-free."

"Where you will be worried to death with the noise of the children."

"I don't mind noise, Harry," I replied, laughing, "you have pretty well broken me into that !" Note : I write this down in order that I may not forget that what seemed as I uttered it a smart repartee, was no sooner spoken than it made me thoroughly ashamed of myself. I am often inexcusably thoughtless in what I say. Yet, as usual, Harry took all in good part ; so I did not apologise, but added, "I have no doubt I shall find it a great advantage" (as indeed I do) "to be so near my little scholars : they will see me so often that they will be soon quite used to me, and not be afraid of the parson. And let me tell you that that is a great point gained."

"That may be," answered Harry, "but if I

had known about the eighty pounds, I would not have let you be Curate of Roost."

"Indeed, Harry? Why, when did you become Bishop of Chadsminster?"

"Never you mind, old fellow. I am *your* diocesan, wherever you are; let that be enough for you. But, by the way, you saw your other diocesan, the real Bishop of Chadsminster, last week, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did you think of him?"

"You should rather ask what he thought of me." Another slip of the tongue, and from the same foolish attempting to seem clever: but this time I was put to the blush, as I deserved to be.

"Well, what did he think of you?"

I felt so confused when Harry answered the fool according to his folly, that at first I could not reply. "You forget," I said, after a pause, "that I was not a stranger. He ordained me, and had me in the Palace at Chadsminster for the previous week of examination."

"Did you get any private conversation with him?"

"Yes, on the morning when he licensed me to the Curacy."

"Well, what did he say to you,—I mean about old Soaper and Roost?"

"Why, it was rather curious; and so, of

course, you will not repeat it. When he called me into his library, there was a little hesitation in his manner, which I thought arose from his knowing nothing about me ; so I was just going to explain, when he cried out, ‘O my good friend, you needn’t tell me that, I know all about you.’ And to my great surprise, he showed that he did, by mentioning matters which had happened at Oxford, and which I can only suppose had come round to him through the good old Provost, who always thinks well of every body, you know.”

“I know nothing of the kind : but go on.”

“The long and the short of the matter was, that he expressed himself interested in my welfare, and even asked about my mother’s health ; though I am sure I had never named her to him.”

“But what did he say about Roost?”

“Why, that was the odd part of the business ; for after speaking so kindly, he turned quite short upon me, and said, ‘Pray, Mr. Dove, how comes it that you are going to Roost?’—‘I heard, my Lord, that the curacy was vacant, and applied for it.’—‘Vacant ! that curacy is always being vacant : you must be the eighth or ninth curate that I have licensed to serve that church since I came to this diocese. Pray, have you ever been to Roost?’—‘No, my Lord.’—‘Have you ever seen Mr. Soaper?’—‘No, my Lord.’

—‘Is it altogether prudent, think you, Mr. Dove, for a man to commit himself to undertake a charge of this sort without seeing the place in which he is to work, and the man with whom he is to work?’—‘My Lord, if Mr. Soaper was content to engage me, I felt that I could only be thankful. It was for him to object, not for me. If he can put up with my ignorance and inexperience, I can have no fear but that I shall be able to meet his wishes. I am not in a condition to pick and choose. I must earn my bread.’—‘Mr. Dove,’ said the Bishop, ‘I believe it matters little, so far as ourselves are concerned, where our sphere of duty lies, so that, wherever we are, we do our best to serve God and promote His glory; but a man in my position must desire to see the right men in the right places; and though you are untried as yet in parochial work, I know enough of you to wish that you had found a more important, and (though perhaps I have no business to say so,) a pleasanter post than Roost is considered to be.’ I answered, that every place must needs be an important one for a beginner; and that though I enjoyed a pleasant country and pretty scenery as much as any one, they were not essential to me.”

“Well, old fellow, and what did the Bishop say to that?”

“O he smiled, and then went on to remark

that he thought I should be thrown away at Roost, and that another kind of man would do better with Mr. Soaper."

"What kind of man?"

"Come, Harry, I am not going to be cross-examined in that manner!"

"An inferior kind of man, or a thicker-skinned kind of man; which was it?"

"I have told you that I should not inform you; and you only distress me by asking. The Bishop clearly knows nothing about my faults and infirmities, and I should think had been misinformed about Mr. Soaper."

"Of manners gentle, of affections mild;
In wit a man; simplicity a child;
A safe companion, and an easy friend,
Unblamed through life, lamented in the end."

So muttered Harry to himself; and I told him at once that as that was the sort of character I should hope to find in Mr. Soaper, so, judging from his letters, it was what I expected to find in him.

But to this Harry only replied by whistling that foolish song which he always introduces when he wishes to be provoking, "Merrily danced the quaker's wife, and merrily danced the quaker." I do wish I knew how to cure him of his excessive volatility, and of the tendency there is in him to mix jest and earnest to such an extent that I am never quite sure

which is which. However, I must do him the justice to say, that on this occasion he only whistled a few bars before he stopped. And then he asked me abruptly whether the Bishop said no more to me. And he was pleased enough, poor fellow, when I repeated the Bishop's promise that he would keep his eye upon me, and his assurance that he felt an interest in me, though he began to whistle again when I said how strongly I felt the need of my being looked after by somebody, for that no one was less fitted to stand alone.

I waited, (this time patiently to all outward appearance, though I was feeling very impatient) till he had done whistling, in hopes that we should then have had a little rational conversation. But I was not rewarded. He said he was late, and must gallop home. And as he rode off he looked over his shoulder, and exclaimed, "Eighty pounds a year, and a garret gratis! Give my compliments to the Screw and Screwess, and tell them I'll have a warrant out against them for starving their apprentice!"

Kind-hearted Harry! If it had been eight hundred instead of eighty, I do not believe you would have been satisfied. But with me the question lay between eighty pounds, and nought, nought, nought. Now, I am not merely independent, but rich enough to help my dear

mother, and repay, in some measure, what she has denied herself to spend on me. O the happiness, the luxury of doing this at last ! And the additional comfort of having that dear soul Mary to manage everything without revealing my secret ! I am truly fortunate. In the first place, I have my lodgings rent free. Then one of our labourers here assured me last week that he didn't believe there was a working man at Roost whose keep cost more than a shilling a day ; and as it is impossible that I can require as much support as a fellow who has been driving a plough, or threshing, or digging for twelve hours, less than seven shillings a week ought to keep me. But put it at seven shillings. That would not be nineteen pounds a year. Say that I set apart eleven more for fuel, and clothing, and alms, it would amount to thirty pounds. And so I can safely reckon on adding fifty pounds to my mother's income. It almost seems too bright a vision to be realized ; but I have not lived and managed for myself in an expensive University in vain. And past experience will teach me how to manage better still now. Surely I have the greatest cause for thankfulness in my present prospects ! Surely mercy and lovingkindness have been following me all the days of my life ! " Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi deerit."

CHAPTER II.

THE ASPECTS OF THE FUTURE.

Polixenes. I beseech you, if you know aught which does
behove my knowledge
Thereof to be informed.

Camillo. Sir, I'll tell you.—Therefore, mark my counsel ;
Which must be even as swiftly follow'd, as
I mean to utter it."

Winter's Tale.

If there be any man in the world who has no business to be fastidious, that man is a parson. If Saint Paul had been fastidious would he have made himself all things to all men? would not his usefulness have been utterly crippled? And yet have I been ready to take a prejudice against Roost, the place and the people, merely because at first sight it did not come up to my notions of a well-conducted country village. I suppose my pride was wounded, or rather, and more contemptible still, my vanity was wounded, because as I was driven down the village street, some neglected-looking, bare-footed children whooped, and squealed, and threw stones at

the horse. A proper person I am to give way to such feelings !

However, a cabbage-stalk that chanced to hit me on the cheek, and putting me into an unmistakeable rage, showed me the sort of tempers to which I was giving way, brought me to my senses, and I saw that I must get rid of such morbid nonsense at once by facing any little unpleasantness which required to be faced. So stopping before the Red Lion, and asking my way to the Vicarage, I proceeded to walk there, while the driver was conveying my luggage to the schoolmaster's house.

A long, wide, straggling, street, made up for the most part of poor-looking houses, and, as it seemed to me, one house in twelve, a beer-shop. There certainly were an unusual number of noisy, and I must say, rude children, who made gibing remarks upon me in audible tones as soon as I had passed them ; but it was the result of thoughtlessness, and of exuberant spirits, for they were just out of school. And I saw in a moment that there was good feeling in them, for when I caught a ball that a little lad threw at me, and tossed it back to him in return with a smile, the young rogue touched his hat, and thanked me, at the same moment that an elder boy called out, " Bob Wilkins, what did you do that for ? If you don't leave folks alone

I'll give you a crack on the head!"—"Nay, nay," said I, "he meant no harm, and I mean to have a game with both of you, before long." So the wind veered round, and they grinned, and looked half-inclined to cluster round me, but before they had advanced more than a step or two, I saw the wild-beast expression of distrust spreading over their faces. "Didn't I hear some of you talk about school?" I asked. "Do any of you go to school?" "Ees, master, I does;"—"and I;"—"and I," cried a score of voices. "Well then," I replied, "we shall soon know one another better. I'm going to live at the school-house."

"Eh! are you though?" "Yes, I am." "Well then you're in for it, Bob Wilkins, as sure as eggs is eggs," cried my original defender. "It's the new parson, and he'll tell the master of you; and won't you get a whopping to-morrow morning? Won't he pitch it into you, my lad, and no mistake?" "Please, sir, Wilkins is always a throwing of stones." "No I a'nt." "Yes you are; you was flogged for knocking over Miss Pratt's cat with a brickbat only last week; you know you was. Ah, well you'll catch it properly now; won't he, sir? Not if anybody would give me a crown would I be in your . . ."

"Boo, oo, oo," howled Master Wilkins.

“ You’ll have sommut to cry for I reckon, to-morrow,” ejaculated the consoler. “ Please, sir, I never throws stones,” shrieked an audacious-looking imp with red hair. “ O my eyes, what a cracker !” responded his neighbour. “ Hark to Jimbo Jinks, he says he never throws stones ; and I seed him filling his pockets with pebbles just now.” “ What by that ?” answers Jimbo, “ I never does throw ’m.”—“ Yes, you do.”—“ No, I don’t.”—“ Well, what dost do with stones in your pockets then ?”—“ Why, I slings them ”—and indignant virtue forthwith proves his veracity by pulling his sling out of his pocket, and by the same process jerking a half eaten apple, and a dead mouse into the gutter. “ Please, sir, Wilkins says that he’s still sore all over with the whopping he had o’ Thursday ; he says he shouldn’t mind so much if it warnt for that : and he says if you’ll let him off he’ll never shy stones at nobody no more !”—“ Not till the next time, I suppose, he means,” I answered,—for a pause in the hubbub gave me at length a chance of being heard. “ Well, boys, I don’t mean to tell tales out of school. So you may make yourselves easy that I shall not complain of you. But when you and I know one another better, we will have some more talk about stone throwing ; and meanwhile, if you chance to see a stranger

coming down your street, don't use him as you have used me to-day."

"No, no, we wonnot," was now the universal cry; and as I went on my way, I heard some of them say to each other, "It's all right: he's a good un, he is!"

Poor children! I must try and deserve their favourable opinion.

At the end of the main street, a road at right angles to it led to the Vicarage, and thither I was proceeding, when, just as I turned the corner, my eye was arrested by the sight of a butcher's shop. It was now within a few days of Christmas, and there was a grand display—(for a country village) of what I suppose was prize beef; at least large masses of disgusting yellow fat (I know it was really very fine suet; but as no one will see this, I may describe the production according to my own notions,) preponderated in the proportion of fifty to one over the dark red meat. I happen to have an intense aversion to the sight and smell of a butcher's shop; and as one of my follies consists in expecting other people to like what I like, and to dislike what I dislike, I am ashamed to say that I took an immediate prejudice against a person who was at that moment contemplating the display of Christmas beef; and I am afraid I muttered to myself the John-

sonian apothegm, "Who slays fat oxen, should himself be fat!"

Very childish of me! but really contemplation is not too strong a term. A tall, very large man was standing with his hands folded behind him, and apparently so entirely absorbed in the study of the joints suspended before him, as to be wholly unconscious of the repeated bows with which a man in a blue apron was endeavouring to attract his attention. How long "the contemplative man's recreation" might have continued, had there been no interruption, it is hard to say; but the sharp rattle of a cart driving up to the shop caused him to turn round with an expression of apprehension; but whether of apprehension lest the cart would drive over him, or that the owner of the cart would carry off the best joint, I know not. Of course, my absurd prejudice suggested the latter, and found confirmation strong as Holy Writ in the fact that he instantly said something to the butcher which was received with a still more profound bow, and a smile of obliged satisfaction. Yet as the gentleman turned away, (for he was a gentleman,) the butcher laid his finger on his nose, and made an odd sort of telegraphing to the man in the cart, which I could not help thinking was in derision of his customer; but I am

thankful to say that as I was beginning, as usual, to pass judgment in a random way, conscience gave me a prick, and asked me whether I never found myself doing or saying things behind people's backs, which I should not do or say to their faces?

When the gentleman turned round, I saw at once that he was a member of my own profession. His clothes had a clerical cut about them; and his hat, if not quite a shovel, was rapidly tending that way. I suppose there was something about me which enabled him with equal facility to divine who I was: for he at once crossed the road and addressed me: "Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Dove?"

Nothing could be more kind and bland than the way in which the words were spoken; and yet I do believe that, (for no better reason than that I had resolved in my own mind that no man who could contemplate uncooked and very fat beef with pleasure, could have anything attractive about him,) I actually noticed, first, that, in spite of a sonorous voice, the speaker spoke through his nose; secondly, that his head was shaped like a pine-apple,—narrow at top, and broad at bottom, with a heavy jowl, which I was charitable enough to look upon as the creation of over-feeding; thirdly, that sal-low and tallow would be the most appropriate

designations for his general colouring, which I determined in the same brief space of time to be thoroughly unwholesome; fourthly, that there were stains on his waistcoat, which led to the inference that he ate his egg untidily, and put sauce into his mouth with the blade of his knife; fifthly, that he was unpleasantly fat and heavy-looking; and sixthly, that reversing the practice of good Mrs. Ferrar, who only ate to live, *he* only lived to eat, and was therefore altogether of the earth, earthy.

All this, in my abominable prejudice and self-conceit, I persuaded myself that I had taken in at a glance, and that there was no room for error or misconception on the subject: and I write down all these shameful libels in order that when I know Mr. Soaper better (for it was he) I may see how far the permitted prejudices of my very ill-regulated mind led me, and so may read myself a sharp lesson for the time to come.

“Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Dove?”

I am afraid that the question was propounded a second time before I shaped my affirmative: but my awkward reserve was broken through by a most cordial shake of the hand.

“Welcome, my good friend, (if you will allow me to call you so) to Roost. May you find it an agreeable residence, and our connexion

one of ever-increasing confidence, and mutual regard ! Preoccupied !” he continued, as I struggled vainly for the courteous reply which I wished to make, but which would not come at my bidding, “ I see that I interrupted you just as your mind was preoccupied with reflections on the weighty responsibilities of the pastoral care, and you were shaping your aspirations for ability to discharge your duties in a new field of useful exertion. My dear sir, I honour you. None but ingenuous minds allow themselves to be preoccupied. The mere worldling finds interest in objects of sense only. I, too, was preoccupied. I had a vision of the pleasures which I was contriving for some of my simple folk here. Substantial fare (a splendid round of beef, in short,) and friendly intercourse, such as befit the jovial Christmas time. I have my tithe dinner on Wednesday, and I make a point of doing all in my power to have things on a pleasant footing with the tithe-payers. But between ourselves, my good friend, they are a rough bucolic race, and their payments are, as you are aware, for small tithes only : such twopenny-halfpenny liquidations that it is quite humiliating to receive them ; and, indeed, in some instances, positively painful, from the ‘ impecuniosity ’ of those that make them. Indeed, were it not for the strong feeling that I

have no right to impoverish the income of my successors, I should wipe my hands of the whole business, and not dirty my fingers with it. However, I take good care that the sum abstracted shall find its way back to the payers' pockets. Indeed, the total received will hardly do more than cover the cost of the tithe dinner and the few dozens of claret which I am advised to take in the course of the year for my stomach's sake, and in order that all my best energies should be in a condition to meet the requirements of my flock, poor things! I dare say, now, that you would judge me to be strong and healthy, Mr. Dove: but it is not so. I am like many an old oak tree, massive without, but hollow and empty within."

"I trust not, sir," was my reply; for my mind revolted from having to do with one who was hollow and empty.

"Ah, my good friend, you are of a spare habit, and have the buoyancy of youth, and freedom from care," (Freedom from care! thought I; how little you must know of my antecedents!) "on your side; but as regards myself, not a day elapses in which I am not afflicted with most distressing sensations of emptiness and sinking: in fact, I am such a victim to dyspepsia, that I am always obliged at this season to leave the dull atmosphere of the mid-

land counties, and recruit my energies with a sojourn at Brighton or elsewhere,—which was, indeed, the reason why I was so desirous for your early arrival at Roost. In fact, the state of my health has often made me wish to give up my residence here altogether, and I have more than once given the Bishop a hint on the subject: but between ourselves, my good friend, these strait-laced prelates of the new school, with their peculiar notions about the amount of parochial work, and their exacting requirements with respect to services, and schools, and all kinds of novel experiments, are very uncomfortable cattle to deal with. Some people admire our Bishop of Chadsminster very much: but for my own part I have found him very fussy and disobliging,—not to say brusque and rude. At the last interview I had with him, he told me curtly that he never would hear of a non-resident incumbent of Roost. And I believe I should have resigned the cure then and there, if I had not felt persuaded that there was nothing he would have liked better. But I can tell him this: he shall not ride rough-shod over me; and that, in point of fact, he ought to be very much obliged to me for taking charge of such a beggarly place as Roost. Why, my good sir, a poor vicarage like this will hardly keep a gentleman in kitchen candles. If I had

nothing of my own, I should starve here. Luckily for the people of Roost, I have some private means, which, with the sinecure Rectory of Bedward Drones, which has been in our family for some generations, just enable me to keep the pot boiling."

Mr. Soaper paused to take breath, and I know that I ought to have said something in reply, but I felt so bewildered with the multiplicity of topics on which he had touched, and was so confounded by that nervous inquiry, "What had I better say?" which always suggests itself at the most unlucky moments, that I again stood mute; and then, frightened at my own silence, shammed a cough, and proceeded to blow my nose,—which did not want blowing. Certainly meanness and cowardice are among my chief characteristics!

"But, dear me!" exclaimed the Vicar, "here am I running on in a strain of egotism, forgetting meanwhile that you are just off a journey, and are, most probably, half-famished. Allow me to exercise some small hospitality towards you. Come with me to the Vicarage, and have some luncheon; or stay,—you are thinking it too late for luncheon; well, I suppose it is getting on towards four o'clock, and food now might spoil your appetite for dinner. We dine at six o'clock, and I dare say that Mrs. Soaper has

enough in the house for a stray guest, though we live, as I may say, from hand to mouth; quite in a plain way, my good friend, quite in a plain way. Come and make the experiment. Eh! what? Don't trouble yourself to make an excuse. Don't stand upon ceremony. I read in your countenance, though you haven't said a word, that you would rather go straight to your lodgings. Well, be it so. Whatever is most pleasant to you will be most agreeable to us. Always happy to see you. Any day, or every day, the same to us. Don't thank me; you would only distress me. All obligation is on my side; and, without compliment, my impressions are so favourable that I am longing to introduce you to the Vicarage. Mrs. Soaper will be charmed to make your acquaintance; and let me tell you, my dear friend, that acquaintance with her is no common privilege. A most superior-minded woman that, sir; most superior indeed! Such decision of character! Such candour! Such soaring above the ordinary weaknesses of her sex! Weakness, indeed, she has none, except, perhaps, where her intense affection for me may make her slightly vulnerable. I have no doubt that the fear of a rival in my heart would madden her. And I am therefore obliged to be careful. I do as I would be done by, for I suppose that by

nature I am somewhat jealous myself. But you will see to-morrow that my Lopy (I call her Lopy for short, but her true name, and let me add, a most appropriate one, is Penelope) is, indeed, one in ten thousand. I am singularly blessed in my family ; for no less admirable than her mother, is my precious Martha,—Martha ‘ sole daughter of my house and heart.’ She is our only stay,—the prop of our old age. Mrs. Soaper had twin boys twice ; but they were blighted blossoms, and being prematurely anxious to see this ‘ rude, bad, world,’ came into it in such a hurry that I fancy they only just turned the whites of their eyes upon it, and departed. But they live in marble, or at least in slate. You will see in yonder churchyard a touching memorial to our lost quartett, and I hope you will read with pleasure the quatrain that I have rhymed to their memory. But the subject is a forbidden one. Even at this distance of time, I cannot trust myself to speak of my loss. Farewell, my good sir, farewell. Let me see you at the Vicarage to-morrow ; *after* breakfast, and *before* luncheon ; say mid-way between the two ; you will find me at home, and proud to introduce you.”

I have recorded Mr. Soaper’s first conversation with me as well as I can, for although there was some peculiarity of manner,—not to

say eccentricity about it, I think it shows that he must be a simple, open-hearted man, and moreover that he is one with whom I shall have no difficulty in working. And after all, what business have I to call him eccentric? He does not see things just as I do, or express himself precisely as I should; but what then? Most probably, he thinks me very eccentric, or perhaps rude and boorish, for I stood "stuck," as the saying is, and hardly found words to express my thanks for his attention.

On parting from the Vicar, I made my way to the school-house, whither my luggage had preceded me. I have a small sitting-room looking into the boys' play-ground, which I suppose will make it noisy, but I shall soon get used to that. I am sorry to see that the chimney smokes, and apparently very much, when the wind is in some quarters, for the ceiling is almost black. The schoolmaster's wife says that the whole house smokes, and attributes her sore eyes, poor thing, to that cause. I asked whether nothing could be done, but she was not very encouraging, and suggested that perhaps I should manage with things in their present condition as long as I wanted them. The three last Curates, she said, had all spoken of undertaking alterations at their own expense, for the Vicar declined having anything to do

with it, but they all of them left without doing anything. "I dare say they got other preferment," said I, "I expect to stay where I am."—"Well, sir," was the reply, "we shall see." There was something I thought in the tone which implied more than was said; but I dare say it was fancy, and I hate inuendoes. As for the sitting-room, if the chimney smokes it will be a fair excuse for doing without a fire, and that will save fuel, and I can always have a hot brick if my feet get very cold. The bed-room is certainly not comfortable, for, being in the slope of the roof, I can hardly stand up in it; but a bedroom is for lying, not for standing in; and I don't mean to pass much time in it.

When I went down to the Vicarage on the following morning, I was shown into a room which seemed to me almost too luxurious an apartment for work, so that I was quite surprised when Mr. Soaper apologized to me for receiving me in what he called his "den." "But the fact is, my good friend, a parson's study must always have a rough, business-like, aspect in it. One must have one's tools about one, the objects that occupy one's daily life. My daughter, saucy child, tells me that it is an uncomfortable hole, and pretends to be afraid of my gun-case and fishing-tackle. By the way, Mr. Dove, are you anything of a flyfisher?"

"No, sir, I have not had the opportunity since I was a mere lad."

"Well, well, we are fishers of men you know, and you have yet your apprenticeship to serve, so that perhaps it is just as well that you should have relinquished the amusement. I find fishing-tackle very expensive, and some people are very jealous of their water-rights. Indeed I believe that were not my health as delicate as it is, and if the doctors had not prescribed a large amount of relaxation as indispensable, I should give up the sport. Ah! you are looking at that row of folios. Sturdy tomes, are they not? Many a man in my position would like his Curate to suppose that he read nothing else; but, my dear sir, I let you at once behind the scenes. I have no concealments from you. I never read a line of one of them, and I never mean. One volume lies on the table; Chrysostom of course; for a 'Chrysostom to smooth one's bands in,' is the orthodox thing, isn't it? No, I never study the Fathers; the very look of their backs is enough to turn the stomach of an ostrich. Don't you think so?—No, I see you don't. Well, my good friend, if you want light reading, I have not the smallest objection to your reading any or all of them. They belonged to my grandfather, a worthy gentleman to whom I am under infinite obligations; for

he wrote a hand as legible as the type of a Church-Bible, and he left behind him near a hundred sermons. I have been preaching them over and over again these twenty years, and shall continue to preach them till my congregation follows the advice contained in them. Ha, ha, ha! By the way, my friend, I hope you are a dab at composition. You mustn't rely upon my aid in that respect, for I never was very fond of preaching: like Slender's love for Anne Page, it was not great at the beginning, and it has pleased heaven to decrease it upon better acquaintance. The fact is that long-continued dyspepsia has made me nervous; and though I shall make a point of helping you when I am at home, and feel up to it, you must never count on my services. You can write a sermon of your own composition?"

"I believe that I could always manage one or two weekly."

"And what sort of stuff are they?"

"I can only promise to bestow pains upon them; others must judge of their quality."

"Of course; but between ourselves, my good fellow, I hope you are not one of those gentlemen who aim at being a crack preacher. My grandfather's discourses are good, homely, stuff; and I shouldn't like to have my ancestor's nose put out of joint. I mean to preach on Sunday,

so you will have an opportunity of judging of his style before I go to Brighton; and I would advise you to frame your sermons on the same model. It would never do to give our people different food from that which they have been used to. Did you hear Jack Droughty's answer to the popular preacher?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you needn't repeat it, but the man was Erasmus Lovelocks. Half the women in London run after him; and he was down in these parts on a visit to my Lady Blenkinsop, who lives in Jack's parish, and who was, of course, set upon having him in the pulpit. So she introduces the doctor to Jack; and on the strength of the introduction, 'Mr. Droughty,' says he, 'I'm an idle man just at present, and I hope you will allow me to preach for you next Sunday.' 'Greatly honoured, and obliged,' was the reply, 'but if it is the same to you I would rather not. If you preach better than I, my people would think scorn of my sermons for the time to come; and if you preach worse than I do,—why heaven help you!' So Lovelocks and my lady took nothing by their motion; and the moral of my tale as respects yourself is that as the folks at Roost have been reared on my grandfather's homilies, you must try and assimilate your dietary to

his. Perhaps you may think his food little better than milk and water, but if you give laudanum and brandy instead, you'll find that you will come to grief."

I hardly knew what answer to make to this, so I said generally that I would do my best to conform to his wishes.

"O you'll easily do that, if you'll just be content with things as they are. You'll find the duty nice and light. The clergy are not to be worked to death. I've no notion of making a bed which no one but myself can lie on, which seems to be the object now-a-days, with your pattern Parish Priest. What I found here when I came, I shall transmit (or at any rate, most of it) to my successor. The rage for increasing the number of services is, to my fancy, a great nuisance. And really one had need to be made of cast iron to be able to get through the mere Church work which some parsons cut out for themselves. As to wearing out my strength in teaching a pack of grubby children in a frowzy school, it is what I positively decline doing. The smell of heads absolutely puts a stop to the progress of digestion in my case. And besides, what is the school-master paid for, if I am to do his work? For my own part I don't see what good comes from all this overteaching. The best servants are

those that can't read or write. All the trash that government inspectors are so fond of is forgotten as soon as learnt. What's the use of geography to a ploughboy? Some folks seem to think that if we could only have the British Museum thrown open on Sundays, England would become the most moral and enlightened country on the face of the earth. A pack of stuff! Excuse my warmth, my good sir, but is it not so?"

I was glad to be able to answer in the affirmative.

"Well, then, Mr. Dove, having thus given you my notions on the subject of preaching, services, and education, I believe I have completed the cycle of matters to be discussed. Our opinions are obviously in harmony, and your own good sense will suggest the proper manner of filling in details which I have only slightly sketched."

"I must beg you to excuse me, but you have made no allusion to your system of parochial visiting. I should like to know what the manner may be in which you conduct it."

"System? dear me, I have no particular system. I just do what is wanted. When anybody sends for me, I go as soon as I can, or get Mrs. Soaper or Martha to take my place. Infectious cases I do not meddle with, being a

family man. They will devolve upon you, who, being in the vigour of youth, run little or no risk. By the way, never go down to a cottage to baptize a child privately. Let the infant be brought to you. I always insist on this arrangement, it saves so much trouble. If the child is pretty strong, it is the obvious thing to do; if it be weakly, the fresh air will brace it; and if it should chance to be moribund, the exposure can make no difference. There! we are fairly at the end of our budget. By the way, there is no objection to your calling on the farmers, if you like it; but if you do, you must lay your account to being pressed to eat pound-cake, stale and greasy, and to drink, ugh! home-made wine. The state of my own interior makes this an impossibility with me; and so these visits of state have come to an end: though, by the way, I sometimes look in upon old Mrs. Cooper of the Grange; for a glass of her ale, when one has been toiling all the morning of a hot September day through the stubbles after partridges, is a draught fit for an emperor. And though you don't shoot, you can call on the jolly old dame occasionally; and when you do, don't fail to try the ale. Try the ale, sir, you will find it meat and drink."

"Well," I answered, laughing, "that certainly might be a temptation; but the fact is,

I never drink malt liquor. It is expensive, and I do just as well without it."

"Stick to the orthodox port, eh?"

I could hardly help smiling, and shook my head. "Not a teetotaller, I trust!" exclaimed Mr. Soaper, looking very much aghast.

"No, and yes," I answered. "No taker or maker of temperance pledges, for I believe that my baptismal vow has anticipated the necessity: but yes, in the sense of my being a resolute drinker of water."

"My good sir, you make me shudder. Your constitution will be ruined, and you will be as bloated as a balloon."

"No symptoms of either at present."

"Perhaps not; but the time will come inevitably. But why, let me ask you, are you so frightfully abstemious? Do you have a platter of pig-nuts on your table, to balance the water-jug? No wine, no ale, not even small beer?"

I am afraid that I blushed as I said, "No."

"Yet remember the venerable distich,—almost the only Latin that has not escaped me:

"Alum, si sit stalum, non est malum.

Beerum, si sit cleerum, est sincerum."

Even an Ascetic, a Trappist, might drink small beer. Why not small beer?"

"Because, sir, honestly, I cannot afford it."

"Why your Curacy is eighty pounds a year.

And, by the way, that puts me in mind to say that the outgoings from it from any local claims will be a mere trifle,—four or five pounds a year, at furthest. My curates have generally given a couple of guineas yearly towards the support of the schools ; and we have made up the organist's salary among us since there has been this difficulty about the Church-rates. I confess I see no good in an organist, or in organ either, for that matter ; and I should have been quite content to have got rid of both : I would give the parish nothing which it was not disposed to pay for. However, the ladies were all against me, and as they usually contrive to get matters their own way, I had to fork out a pound, and I expect they will call upon you for another : and then, let me see, there's the coal fund, and the clothing club, and one or two other things of the same kind which I can't recall just at this moment ; but the sum total will be inconsiderable."

I wish I had thought so ; but the fact is that I was quite aghast at hearing of this unexpected call upon me. Of course, I had calculated upon some outlay in alms ; but I see now that, in devoting the chief part of my income to my mother's support, I had excused myself from almost all other claims, and that in fact I was indulging in a great deal of selfishness. I

am glad now, though it gave me a wrench at the moment, to have had these trappings of self-deceit stripped off. I do not like to be charitable, unless, forsooth, I can be charitable in my own way. The moment a matter of this kind is settled for me, and I am expected to do it as a matter of course, I revolt. 'Come down, proud stomach, come down.' You have been the offending member, and you shall bear the punishment for your pains. These five pounds shall be deducted from the expenses of my table.

I suppose that Mr. Soaper thought I looked rather blank, and that my countenance gave the lie to my words; for though I assented readily enough, he seemed to deem it necessary to frame an apology.

"Of course, my dear sir, we shall take care not to press too hard upon you. I can quite enter into the difficulties of the '*res angusta domi*.' Indeed, I continually experience it myself. I am often very much pinched. Though I may seem, in the opinion of the world, to have a fair nominal income, there are heavy claims upon me; duties of hospitality to be exercised; the removal of my family to Bath or Brighton from time to time, as the indifferent state of my health makes change of air and scene to be needful; the—the—in short, my

good friend, it is with extreme difficulty that I can make both ends meet : and therefore, though you are single, and I have the burden of providing for a family on my shoulders, I can quite enter into your feelings as to the expediency of thrift. ‘ Penny and penny, laid up will be many.’ Oh no ! we will not be hard upon you. And meanwhile, any little comforts, now, that you may have a fancy for, and which we can supply from the Vicarage, during our absence from home, shall be at your service. Milk, for instance, new milk from our little Alderney that has just calved, and who will be eating her head off in the paddock,—you must have your milk from the Vicarage ; yes, and garden-stuff : O positively, you must and shall have the garden-stuff : it would only be thrown to the pigs else. And, by the way, Mr. Dove, can you ride ? ”

“ O yes.”

“ Well, well, my Bucephalus will have nothing to do. A canter upon the downs occasionally will do him good and yourself too. I will give all necessary orders. Nay, my good friend, no thanks, no thanks. And now come with me, and let me introduce you to my ‘ womankind.’ ”

CHAPTER III.

THE WOMANKIND.

"*Valentine.* And is she not a heavenly saint ?

Protheus. No ; but she is an earthly paragon."

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

I do not know whether it is nervousness, or bashfulness, or both, that make me so awkward, but I believe that if I had the choice, I should always prefer a beating to being ushered into the company of strangers. But formidable as the ordeal is at all times, it becomes positively terrible, when I find myself in company with those who devolve on me the task of making conversation. I remember that soon after I went to college our good old Provost asked me to dinner. He was such a kind man that I did not dread it as much as I expected, and as I knew that John Sinclair, a talking, rattling fellow, full of undergraduate nonsense, was to dine there too, I felt that I might shrink, like a

snail, into my shell, and that he would make himself agreeable enough for us both. Somehow it had not entered into my calculations that one so fluent as Sinclair, would be less at his ease when in the Provost's drawing-room than at a college wine-party ; that, in fact, I was more at ease in company than himself. In old days at Verdon I had been used to a houseful of guests, while poor Sinclair was, I believe, the son of a man whose taste lay rather in his stables and his kennel than in good society, and so he had few advantages at home of mixing with his equals. The consequence was, that having a good deal of natural cleverness, he got on well enough in the free-and-easy society of youths of his own age, but, among his elders, and in the company of women, he was as shy and constrained as if he had been born in a different class of life, and found himself suddenly transferred to one with which he had no habits or feelings in common. But of all this I as yet knew nothing, and so, with no misgivings on my part, we wended our way together to the Provost's lodgings. I was behind Sinclair when we were shown into the drawing-room, but before the door was closed, he contrived to thrust me forward. Never shall I forget that moment. There were a couple of couches, and a couple of chairs, forming an avenue of approach on either side the fireplace.

And on these couches and chairs sat the six Misses Waynflete, the Provost's daughters, and their two cousins the Misses Chicheley, all in white muslin, and all looking, as it seemed to me, as if they thought that we had been shown in by mistake, and that we had come on the wrong day. I felt as if I would have given all I had in the world (it was little enough!) to refer to the Provost's card of invitation, or to have made a bolt, and rushed to the good man's dressing-room to inquire whether he expected me or no: but my presence of mind, if ever I had any, was gone. I only knew that I was scarlet to the very roots of my hair, that all moisture had left my throat, tongue, and palate, and had fled in a cold exudation into the palms of my hands. I made my bow, and got eight bows in return.

That fairly settled me. I retreated a step backwards, and trod heavily on Sinclair's foot. If he had but been a dog and howled (he declared afterwards that I lamed him for a week,) I believe I could have ejaculated "Poor fellow!" and the spell would have been broken: but as it was, I could only think that I had never been introduced to Waynfletes or Chicheleys, and I was seized with a conviction that it must be a breach of college discipline to speak to the daughter of the head of a house before I had

been formally introduced to her. What to do, therefore, I knew not. I thought a cough would help me, and tried the experiment; but no: if I had broken a bloodvessel in the effort I could not have produced anything like an honest cough,—there only came a croak which set my eyes watering, and then ended with a short squeak. I heard a gasp behind me. It was Sinclair, who after sending the fingers of both hands through his hair, subsided into an arm-chair, which being lower than he expected, received him with a bump, and then by means of its spring cushion projected him with a bound. However he clutched at a table, and so found his proper level. Not knowing what else to do, I retreated some few steps without thought of where I was going, and only saw, when too late, that I had got into a *cul de sac* between a piano-forte and the wall, in the middle of which stood a high chair having a seat some eight inches in diameter, and an upright back rising to a level with the nape of one's neck. On this I took up my position, and so completed the measure of my misery, for how expedient soever such an instrument of torture might be for young ladies at their music practice, it is by no means adapted to male habits and postures, and, as I sat on it, my continual expectation was that I should lose my balance, and fall sprawling

forward with my face on the carpet. Talk of the interval between the time when the victim's head is fixed in the lunette, and the blade of the guillotine falls ! I think it must be endurable compared with those ten minutes which elapsed before Provost Waynflete made his appearance, and a thaw commenced. There sat ten people, speechless, motionless, each getting shyer and shyer every moment, each wondering what in the world ought to be done, and each unable to break through the barrier of *mauvaise honte*.

Often have I wished I could have been behind the curtain when those quiet demure-looking young ladies had retired out of the reach of male ears to discuss the yahoos who had conducted themselves with so much civility and self-possession. Whether they ever told the story I know not. As their shyness was proverbial, and as perhaps they felt as much distressed at their silence, as we did at ours, they may have kept their own counsel, as closely as Sinclair and I did, who knew that to betray ourselves would be to make ourselves the laughing-stock of the college.

The incident, however, taught me one lesson, namely, that matters are only made worse by trusting to extraneous aid for deliverance from the awkwardness of shyness. One must grapple

with difficulties of this sort, and master them *in propria persona*.

I cannot say that I had any expectation that Mr. Soaper would be tongue-tied when entering his own drawing-room, or that he would be unable to find the necessary words when he proposed to introduce me to his wife and daughter; but there is something very unpleasant in being trotted out for inspection, and though pride, or some such paltry temper, lies at the bottom of the feeling, I never find that (struggle as I may against it) I can get rid of it. And so I followed the Vicar with the trepidation that comes over me on such occasions as this; but I hope with the resolution to break through my natural habits of reserve, and to show my eagerness to make friends of those with whom my office would bring me into such close connexion.

"My dear," said Mr. Soaper, "I have brought my good friend Mr. Dove to make your acquaintance."

Mrs. Soaper made an inclination of her head, and ceased to write, but she retained her pen in her hand, as if its services would be required again immediately.

"Martha, Mr. Dove." Miss Soaper bowed too, setting her elbows very square, in order, apparently, to prevent any mischief to a scarlet and white hood which she seemed to be knitting

for a baby, from a receipt before her, for I heard her mutter to herself "Slip one, knit one, seam three, repeat all round:" but for anything Miss Soaper knew to the contrary, I believe that my face might have been as black as my coat. She never raised her eyes. I couldn't help thinking how different my mother's,—or Mary's reception of a stranger would have been; but then they are kind to everybody. However, the natural manner of some people is rather cold and repelling, and is their misfortune rather than their fault.

"It is very kind of you, madam," I said, "to allow me to pay my respects to you at such an early hour, and I hope I may venture to say that I come to Roost with the very earnest desire to prove myself worthy of kindness." I knew I was talking nonsense, but I felt that I should stick fast, if I did not begin to speak before I got awed.

"Well, sir, I am sure I hope that you will get on comfortably with Mr. Soaper and the parish, and if so, you will find us disposed to show you all proper attention; but you must not be surprised, Mr. Dove, if I don't feel much excitement on the arrival of a new Curate. I believe the Vicar has had half a score in almost as many years, and really we have had so much molestation from them, some of them doing too much, and some of them doing too little, and

all of them full of wants and complaints, fancying themselves slighted, or making themselves offensive, that I really dread the very name of a Curate, and sometimes think that it is more the general failure of his Curates than of his digestion which has brought Mr. Soaper into such a delicate state of health."

"I am sincerely sorry to hear it, ma'am," I replied, "and I can assure you that nothing shall be wanting on my part to induce you to change your opinion of the race of Curates."

Mrs. Soaper dipped her pen in the ink, but made no reply; so her husband took up the conversation.

"Ah, my dear Lopy, there is no use in reverting to the past. We have had our disappointments, no doubt, but Mr. Dove, you see, comes among us prepared to make up for them all; and we, on our part, must do what we can to make him comfortable. My dear, there's a stewed carp for dinner, I know, for Skillet came to the study just now about it. I'm tired to death of her sauce *à matelotte*, and she always puts too much onion into it. One tastes the onion,—positively distinguishes its presence; and that I hold to be as fatal an error in that sauce as can be made. Don't you think so, Mr. Dove?"

"I particularly dislike a twang of onion," was my reply; "but I am not sure that I know the sauce of which you are speaking."

"Not know sauce à matelotte? why, 'tis as common as melted butter. Where can you have been living?"

"I have not been in the way of seeing much cookery of late years."

"Of course not," observed Mrs. Soaper, shortly.

"Then, my good friend," cried the Vicar, "allow me to say that I really feel for you. There is nothing that tries the constitution so severely, and indeed there is nothing which undermines the most robust health so rapidly, as exposure to the vicissitudes of indifferent cookery. Take my advice, and wherever else you keep down expenditure, don't let it be in your cook's wages, when you have got hold of a good one. Poor old Ude used to say, that 'there are cooks and cooks, just as there are painters and painters; but that he who has got a thoroughly good cook in his kitchen, may be as proud as if he has a first-rate Rubens in his gallery.' Just think of the horrible abomination that might be made of a carp by an indifferent artist! Why, to begin with, she would not have an idea what you meant if you told her it must be dressed 'au bleu.' Even Skillet

did not know till I showed her, the proper way of folding the cloth in which the carp is placed in the stewpan; and in making the marinade in which it is to be stewed, she had fallen into the heresy of using red wine only, instead of the proper proportion of two of white to one of red. Poor thing, she knew no better; and I have seldom much fault to find now. I have told her to dress the carp to-day quite simply in the 'court bouillon.' It will be a refreshing change; and I should like Mr. Dove to give his opinion of it."

"My dear, in your love of hospitality, you forget that James is gone off with the heavy luggage to Brighton, and that there is no one to wait at table but Jane, and that there is only enough of the glass and china left out for the use of our three selves, and that all the servants are packing up, and"

"There is no cheese in the house," gently murmured Miss Martha, *sotto voce*, with her red ringlets still drooping over her red wool.

"Yes, and there is no cheese in the house, and"

"O, do not give the matter another thought, ma'am," said I. "I shall be very happy to dine with you, if you like it, on your return; but I know that nothing is more inconvenient than the appearance of an unexpected guest at

the dinner-table, when a household is on the eve of a journey."

"Ah, well, my good sir," sighed the Vicar, "I suppose our pleasure must be deferred. These matters must be left in the hands of the ladies. I believe it is best that it should be so, though the dear creatures are sad tyrants at times. Arn't they, Martha?"

Martha shook her ambrosial curls, but responded not.

"But Lopy," continued the Vicar, "as we don't carry the cows and the garden with us, I am thinking we might desire Raikes to let Mr. Dove have a supply of vegetables, and some milk."

"Whatever you please, Mr. Soaper: you can give your own directions: only, I thought you meant to turn the dairy to some account in our absence. Butter is selling dear at present."

"True, most true: I can do both: supply Mr. Dove and the market. Nay, my good sir, I insist upon it. Not a word more on the subject. I shall speak to Raikes forthwith, and shall tell him at the same time that he is to let you have a gallop on Mayflower, when you want her."

"Are you used to riding, Mr. Dove?" inquired Mrs. Soaper.

"O yes, I have been a horseman all my life, though I have had few opportunities lately."

"Ah, then, you have got out of the habit, and perhaps have never been in the way of mounting such a thorough-bred animal as Mayflower. Mr. Soaper's kindness makes him quite thoughtless, and he forgets that she threw Mr. Blinkers (our last Curate but one) over her head, and if he had not been luckily thrown into a bed of black mud, he would certainly have had his neck broke. Indeed, Mr. Soaper has been very unlucky. Mr. Tabberer, that was here before Mr. Blinkers, ruined poor Bavieca."

"Ah!" muttered the Vicar, "I believe he had never crossed a horse in his life before. For I remembered afterwards that when I asked him whether he could ride, his answer was that he supposed so. He was one of those gentlemen who are self-reliant, and stick at nothing, one of your Lord Johns, who would undertake the command of the Channel fleet, or perform an operation for the stone, with or without an hour's notice. My belief is that as soon as I had made my offer, he went and bought a pair of spurs, threw himself on Bavieca's back, and clinging to the saddle with both hands, urged the poor beast to a gallop down Shatterham Gap.

'With that the Cid, clad as he was in mantle furred and wide,

On Bavioca vaulting, put the rowel in his side ;

And up and down, and round and round, so fierce was his career

Stream'd like a pennon on the wind Ruy Diaz' minivere.'

But he could not manage matters like the Campeador. He came down, in less than no time, squash on his nose, and broke it."

"Yes," exclaimed Mrs. Soaper, "and if that had been all, it would not have mattered so much; but he broke Bavioca's knees into the bargain. But it is always the way with you, Mr. Soaper; you are so accommodating, so liberal in your offers, so forgetful of yourself, that you are sure to be victimized. It is always the way with good-natured people; don't you think so, Mr. Dove?"

"Not always, I hope," was my reply.

"Ah, I forgot. I ought not to have appealed to you. You have accepted the Vicar's offer. But don't you think, Mr. Dove, that you will find it more convenient to make your parochial visits on foot? Mayflower is rather fidgety, and it is not always easy to find a man to hold a horse."

"Believe me, ma'am, I never contemplated using the Vicar's horse as my hack. Perhaps I might have borrowed her once or twice in order to ride over to Harleyford Hall. I believe

it is beyond a walk, and I dare say you know, ma'am, that the general is a man who expects these kind of attentions. I am under great obligations to him, and his son is a great friend of mine. He was my pupil at Oxford."

"I know very little about the general," answered Mrs. Soaper sharply. "He may expect attentions, but I can't say we have found him inclined to pay them. I don't think he has called here for months, and as for dining with him, he has not asked us once since the fêtes that were given when the youth you are so fond of came of age,—(and there was no great civility in that, for they asked half the county, and fed us on cold meat in a tent;) and they never asked Martha at all. I suppose they were afraid of the heir falling in love with her."

I know it was very rude, but somehow I could not help smiling at the notion of Harry being captivated with Miss Soaper. I don't think that he ever saw her, but with his absurd prejudice about red hair, I am convinced that he would not have looked at her twice. I am afraid that Miss Soaper saw the expression of my face, for she said at once, in a very decided tone,

"They need not have felt any anxiety on that score; for I should not have gone if they had asked me. I would rather stay at home

any day, than be mixed up with a tag, rag, and bobtailry that is gathered together, as that was, for electioneering purposes."

"My dear," said Mr. Soaper, addressing his daughter, "while I live, I flatter myself you will always take your place in the best society, as part and parcel of myself. And when I am gone, I trust you will be in a condition to maintain whatever position you choose."

"Yes," said Mrs. Soaper, "a girl who has been staying at Thorswoldestone Castle, and has been permitted by the Marchioness of Kingsbury, (who is known to be the most particular woman living) to associate with Lady Adeliza Fazakerley and her sisters, need not trouble herself to go begging for the patronage of Harleyford Hall."

"No, indeed," said the Vicar, growing somewhat red in the face. "You don't know the Kingsburys, Mr. Dove?"

"No, sir."

"Probably not, my good sir. The Marquis is rather exclusive; but he always throws aside his reserve with me; and any one of whom I spoke favourably would, I am convinced, have his countenance. A considerable portion of this parish, you know, belongs to him; the heath you passed over in coming here is a part of Thorswold Chase, which has been in the pos-

session of his family since the days of the Saxons; in fact the first Fazakerley is supposed, (though there is no good in routing out ancient scandals, and the Marchioness, with her extreme sense of propriety,—some people call her a prude, but they judge her too severely no doubt,—never likes to have the subject alluded to,) to have been a son of Edmund Ironsides by Gunhilda of Face-aken, a Danish Princess, and as some say, a very indifferent character,—as, my dear sir, I lament to say, that even princesses have been both before, and since. But be all this as it may, the Marquis is the most influential man in these parts, a nobleman to whom I am proud to look up as a great authority, and the Marchioness, who, like her husband, is of a most ancient family,—(her father was the last Lord Vairy and Gules, and the barony is now extinct) is a charming woman; a little reserved and haughty, perhaps, and rather intolerant with respect to anybody or anything which is not thoroughly ‘*comme il faut*’; perhaps a little too unrelenting with respect to persons who may have unintentionally, or through ignorance, been guilty of breaches of decorum”

“No, indeed, Mr. Soaper. I know what you are alluding to, and think her quite right. She would have nothing to say to the Miss

Rashleighs after they had wrapped themselves up in their brothers' military cloaks, and put short pipes in their mouths, when they were acting charades at Barlington Abbey. It was very improper, very unfeminine."

"My dear, it was in the midst of a family party. The young ladies were in their father's house, in presence of their parents."

"Yes, and of two or three life-guardsmen. Depend upon it, Mr. Soaper, it was inexcusable conduct. They had forgotten what was due to society. Women pretending to be men! thoroughly indelicate! perfectly disgusting! Ugh! The Marchioness was quite right; don't you think so, Mr. Dove?"

"Upon my word, madam, I am quite unable to judge; but you, with your knowledge, and experience . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know all about it, and my deliberate opinion is, that the Marchioness was perfectly justified in cutting the connection. At least I am sure that I should have done so, even though I have not the position to maintain, and the example to set which she has. No, a person of her rank must never overlook even an accidental act of indecorum. She must always bear in mind that society expects much at her hands. And even supposing her, now and then, to be a little imperious, (though im-

perious is too strong a word) her high station quite justifies her; don't you think so, Mr. Dove?"

"That high station justifies a lady in being imperious? No, ma'am," I answered, "I do not think so. So far as I have had an opportunity of judging, I have always thought that where those of the highest rank were the least exacting they had the widest sway. People of the highest rank are usually those who are least jealous in asserting it: they never seem to me to think about it."

"I suppose, Mr. Dove, you have had no great amount of experience among the aristocracy?" asked Mrs. Soaper.

"Very little," said I.

"Ah well, my good sir," interposed the Vicar, "now you are my curate, you will be in a different position to that in which you may have been heretofore. You may count on being very generally noticed by the gentry of the neighbourhood. There has been great condescension shown by the Castle to several of them, especially to one of them, Mr. Crawley, who I must say showed a deference which was quite remarkable in these days, to his superiors in rank. And it tended greatly to his advantage; he got so thoroughly into Lady Blenkinsop's good graces, that she obtained a living for him, down

in the fens, out of Lord Chancellor Scrattle. Let me advise you, my dear sir, always, so far as you have the opportunity, to cultivate the favourable notice of the aristocracy, by showing yourself ready to serve them, and to conform to their wishes. I always do."

"I trust I shall not be deficient in Christian courtesy," said I, "to any class with whom I may be brought into contact, but I should hardly feel it necessary to go so far as you suggest."

"No? my good sir, you astonish me; but as you get more experience, the present fierceness of your independence, (if you will allow me to call it so) will be smoothed, and rounded off."

I could only shake my head, and smile, while I assured the Vicar that if I could detect any fierceness of any kind about me, I would do my best to get rid of it instantler.

"I think you misunderstand Mr. Dove, my dear," said Mrs. Soaper to her husband. "He only means that people in subordinate situations should keep to their proper level. A benefited clergyman like yourself, for instance, will take a position in society at once, which would be altogether anomalous for a Curate. You might be in your element at Thorswoldestone Castle, while Mr. Dove might feel himself there to be very like a fish out of water, as not hav-

ing been used to that kind of thing. You seem a judicious person, Mr. Dove; don't you think that the inferior clergy should confine themselves almost wholly to their parochial labour?"

"I think that *all* the Clergy should do so."

I made the reply innocently enough, but it was one of my blunders from thoughtlessness. I saw at once that it was received as an inuendo; for when I looked up the Vicar was red in the face, and so was Mrs. Soaper; and Miss Martha was staring at me indignantly. So trying to amend what I had said, I made matters worse. "What I mean is, that our profession has such demands on us, that we should devote ourselves to it body and soul. And then of course we shall have little leisure for other things."

"A charming sentiment, my dear sir," said the Vicar, folding his hands, and smiling blandly, "and one that I altogether approve. It is a pledge to me of your future devotion to my poor sheep in, what I may call metaphorically, my wilderness of Roost. Happy those, who, like yourself, have health unimpaired, and are uncompelled to seek renewed vigour at a distance from the beloved flock! Happy those whose position does not oblige them, in answer to the calls of society, to mingle with the gay and thoughtless crowd, and to face exposure to the temptations which lie in one's path as one

walks in a missionary spirit through the haunts of rank and fashion, invoking self-denial amid delicious banquets in castellated halls! My dear sir, you, and all who with you share the humble Curate's lot, are men to be envied."

But Mrs. Soaper was not disposed to let me off so easily. "Dear me, Mr. Soaper," she exclaimed, "there can be no question that the beneficed and unbeneficed Clergy stand in totally different positions, and that what is proper for one would be highly improper for the other. Men of your years have borne the burden of the day, and require rest. Men of your calibre must take a prominent rank in their neighbourhoods, and the juniors must work, and obey orders, and keep in the background: there can be no question about that. But I trust that I have misunderstood Mr. Dove as to the allusions he has made to some extraordinary devotion to his profession. I am sure we have bought our experience dearly in that matter. You remember how your first Curate, Mr. Scareham, was always harping upon that string, and we all know how it ended. Don't you think, Mr. Dove, that it is a Curate's place so to regulate his ministrations, as to put it out of the power of meddling people to institute comparisons between himself and the Incumbent? Don't you think that it is his first duty to take

care that his superior in ecclesiastical rank should also be universally considered his superior in his general clerical qualifications? Don't you think, for instance, that a Curate should show himself inferior in the pulpit to the person who employs him?"

One must make a stand somewhere, and I made mine here; for I began to think that, by yielding a tacit assent to Mrs. Soaper's interrogatories, all my definite opinions would slip, or, at least, seem to slip away. Mrs. Soaper's oft-repeated "Don't you think" looked like a trap to entangle me into some admission from which I should shrink if it were put to me in any other form. I began to suspect that in her shrewdness she had detected my reluctance to say "No," and was calculating on my cowardice; that I should dread disagreement with her opinions, and through false shame not venture to assert my own. Altogether,—I must needs confess it,—the form in which the inquiry was put sounded very insidious; and the more frequently she repeated the inquiry which was to commit me, the more insidious it sounded. Perhaps, poor woman, the cowardice was on her part; but I did not think so, and resented her questions, or that particular form of them, by saying bluntly, and decidedly, "No, ma'am, I think nothing of the kind."

"Why, Mr. Dove, what do you think? You would not have a Curate turn a parish upside down, would you, by setting up a separate interest in his own favour?"

"Certainly not, ma'am: I would not have a Curate think about *himself* at all; but simply do his best in the pulpit, and out of it, for the people entrusted to his care."

"Very good, my dear sir, a very sensible remark: I honour you for it. I quite understand you. Nothing can be more satisfactory to me than the explanations you have been so good as to give of your views and intentions. We shall quite agree: I see we shall. I leave you in charge of my flock with the most entire confidence. I have only to suggest to you to keep on the beaten track along which I have been plodding these twenty years, and to follow the judicious principle, '*quieta non movere*.'"

So ended my interview at the Vicarage: a few days more, and the Vicar and his family had taken their departure to Brighton.

I was making my domestic arrangements on the following Monday with Mrs. Ferrall, the schoolmaster's wife, and, to say truth, was scheming how to diet myself as economically as possible, when I bethought me of the offers which Mr. Soaper had made me with respect to a supply of milk and vegetables.

I mentioned them to Mrs. Ferrall, but the result was that she smiled incredulously. I asked her what she meant, and her answer was, "Nothing, sir; only such promises are sometimes made without much thought of the fulfilment being called for."

"Ah," said I, "but the Vicar made quite a point of my sending for these things. Indeed, he was so friendly, that he has given me the use of his horse."

Mrs. Ferrall coughed. I begged her to send down for some milk for my tea.

In half-an-hour's time she came back to me. "You can't have any new milk, sir, from the Vicarage: it is all wanted for cream for the butter. You can have the skim milk if you like, but they charge a halfpenny a quart dearer than they do at the farm-houses. And Raikes says that his orders were to send in all the fruit and vegetables to Chadsminster market."

"And the horse, Mrs. Ferrall?"

"Oh sir, Mrs. Soaper had his shoes taken off, and he was turned out to grass before the family left for Brighton."

CHAPTER IV.

IN FOR A PENNY, IN FOR A POUND.

"If to do, were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions. I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood ; but a hot temper leaps over a cold decree : such a hare is madness the youth, to skip over the meshes of good counsel the cripple."

Merchant of Venice.

I MUST confess that it was a great relief to me when the Vicarage was empty. Why, I can hardly say, for I do not think that I felt any ambition for an undivided throne. In proportion as I began to apprehend the nature of the difficulties which were likely to lie in my path, did I feel that I should be glad to be able to refer to the Vicar himself, and know his wishes. It is so much easier to obey than to direct ; it simplifies matters so exceedingly, and removes such a load of responsibility when one has simply to carry out received instructions, that I certainly should always prefer to be "under

orders." It would have suited me entirely to have gone to sea with the commander who laid it down as a fundamental rule that midshipmen have no business to think. The only objection would have been, that middies now and then grow up into captains, and then their exemption from responsibility is at end. So, in fact, I am better as I am. I dare say I should have been a middy all the days of my life. I should never have distinguished myself, and so have never got promoted: but still in the navy I *might* have been promoted: whereas in the Church, I can feel myself quite safe. I might distinguish myself ever so much, and work ever so hard (and I will try to do both) but I should be safe from all risk of being invited to become "a dignitary." I should live and die a Curate: and I hope I shall always contrive to be a Curate to a resident incumbent. Still, I must own that I was glad when the Soapers were gone. I felt as if I should settle more easily into my place, and by the time I had learned something of the parish, and state of the people, from actual observation, I should be able to adapt myself more readily to the methods in which the Vicar wished the parochial work to be carried on. At present, everything at Roost is new to me, and those from whom I have had to get my instructions have

rather bewildered me : which I dare say they will not do, when I know them better. And if, at first, I have found the family at the Vicarage somewhat uncongenial (perhaps by contrast with my mother and Mary), and discovered that their habits and ways of thinking are different from what I expected to find,—I make no doubt that when I am fairly in harness, I shall get on well enough with them. One can't expect to find all the world adopting the ways of one's own set. It would be wretched work if it did ; one should grow so horridly narrow-minded. Certainly, so far as I have yet made out, Mr. Soaper's notions as to the amount of parochial work to be done, are very different from those which have been inculcated on me : but then he has been here these twenty years : and what do I know about a parish, who have not been ordained a month ? It will be time enough for me to find fault, when I understand thoroughly what is being done here, and what is left undone, and what are the reasons which have influenced the Vicar's decisions in both these respects. I will endeavour to go on quietly ; feeling my way ; learning my work ; and, if possible, keeping out of rows and bothers.

One thing I acknowledge to be especially discouraging,—the aspect of the church. The population of Roost is 730 ; and by no possibility,

I should think, could four hundred persons find accommodation within the walls of that building, which ought to give shelter to the whole flock. It seems to me to be in the last stage of decay, and so far, perhaps, it is well: a better day may be at hand. But at present, things look dreary enough. Three or four thoroughfares through the church-yard, which, in part, is used as a playground for the village children; in part, is a tangled maze of nettles, rank grass, and headstones. In the interior, is a heterogeneous mass of rickety pews of all shapes, sizes, and colours; a glare of whitewashed walls, and the close, fusty smell of rotting hassocks. The chancel is a sorry sight enough. A common deal table, stained red, (its top covered with a piece of scanty baize, which having faded from green to an unwholesome yellow, looks like a very dirty ironing-blanket,) occupies the space beneath the east window: the pavement is rough and broken; while three squalid frames contain, in white letters on a ground of black canvas, the Creed and the Ten Commandments, and the Royal arms of that "pious, glorious, and immortal sovereign, King William the Third;" his heraldic achievement predominating, (as did the monarch himself,) over the Creed and the Decalogue; and all surmounted with a tablet in

blue and gold, in which it is announced that the chancel itself was rebuilt in the year 1774, by the most honourable John George, third Marquis of Kingsbury, Earl of Epsom, Baron Newmarket, K.G., Custos Rotulorum, and Lay Rector of the Parish of Roost.

Everything appeared in keeping with the spirit of this east wall. Everything to do with religion seemed sordid and in decay; the only sign of life was in the large pew occupied by the Marquis's steward, and the very smart members of the said steward's family. So I could not help thinking, as I put on the ragged parish surplice when about to officiate here for the first time. O that surplice! What an unsavoury affair it is to wear another man's dirty shirt, especially when (as I should think must have been the case in the present instance) that shirt is worn at an interval of eleven months at least from its last annual washing! It seemed to me like a great, dreary dormitory, did Roost Church on that occasion. The atmosphere was close and drowsy; and the very sunbeams struggled ineffectually to make their way through the ugly squares of dusty glass. As I opened the dogs-eared Prayer Book, two or three sleepy flies crept out of its unctuous pages; and the pressure of my knees on a cushion set some of the clothes-moths, which evidently infest it, on

the wing. Some eight or ten pews had their inmates. There was a sprinkling of poor folks, mostly aged people, on uncomfortable benches in draughty situations at the bottom of the Church, and there were the school-children in the gallery. The clerk's droning voice was the only one which was heard in the responses, and with a grinding organ and four shrill, wiry-toned girls, he formed the sole choir. I dare say my sermon was as dull and spiritless as the scene around me, for I am shamefully apt to yield to influences of this sort. Not that I had any cause to complain of obvious inattention. On the contrary, the respectable people in the pews sat decorously quiet; and among the elderly folk on the benches were some who, being hard of hearing, bent forward with hand behind the ear to catch, if they could, my words. Even the school-boys received fewer raps over the head from Mr. Ferrall's cane than might have been expected of a race who were subjected to that sort of discipline, as an encouragement, I suppose, to become in their future career, reverent worshippers and attached Churchmen. To judge by what actually passed before my eyes, I should say that Roost is what is usually called a respectable place. Well-to-do people came to Church of their own accord; the old folks came there because their betters in worldly

rank encouraged their doing so ; and the school children came because they would be whipped if they did not : but the mass of the population, where was it ? I had noticed no conventicle. I had heard nothing about dissent. Were the respectable people,—the pew-holders,—the only worshippers at Roost ? and were the unrespected nowhere ?

When I left the pulpit the old clerk followed me to the vestry. “ There be *only* prayers in the afternoon,” said he, and he added that he thought it best to mention it, as one of the former curates had disappointed the people very much by going up into the pulpit, and preaching a sermon when nobody expected it. “ But he know’d no better, ye see. He had not been told. And he was quite a young hand, sir ; and may be liked to hear himself a preaching.”

“ Well, in some places the congregation would have been all the better pleased to have got a sermon.”

“ Like enough, sir ; but it’s not the fashion at Roost. Our folk don’t like too much of a good thing. And if there was a sermon in the afternoon, it would interfere with milking-time : and there’s a deal of cheesemaking on our farms.”

“ But, clerk, I hope you have better congregations in general, than we have had to-day.”

"Better, sir? The congregation was well enough. There was a score more than usual. I expect they came to hear you, sir; you're a novelty, like. You'll excuse me, sir. And most of our people have heard the Vicar's sermons over and over again for many years past. Bless your heart, sir! there's many of them that we knows almost as well by heart as he does himself. There's one about the grim king of terrors,—(that's the way it begins you know) that comes round as regular as the year. And that sharp chap, Dan Hankey, said ever so much of it off beforehand, the last time the Vicar preached it. You'll excuse me, sir, but when the Vicar gave out his text, and began with 'The grim king of terrors, my brethren,' there was such a grin among some of the young ones, that he noticed it, and I was obliged to tell him what had happened. He sent for Dan, and gave it him properly for his impudence: but I reckon he'll hardly preach that sermon again."

"Perhaps he was giving advice which the people of Roost had not listened to, or, at any rate, had not followed, and so he thought it right to repeat again till they did."

"Like enough," said the clerk, "there's a many as hears, and never heeds; but I dunna know as folks heeds the more for being told the same thing in the same words twenty times over."

"Perhaps not, my friend, but we shall have to account at last for every warning we have had and neglected. But now tell me. There might have been a hundred people at church this morning. That is not one in seven of your parish. Where are all the rest?"

"Well, I dunna know. Our folk come mostly in the afternoons: I expect there will be as many again to-night, as there was this morning."

"But that will only give two hundred out of seven."

"Well, I dunna know, sir. I never thought much about it. I notice the folks that I am used to see, and miss them if they are away: but the other folks are not in my mind. Well, sir, I suppose there be a good many that we never sees here: some can't come; some could if they would, but don't. Some of them have got out of the way of it. And some make Sunday their pleasuring day. There's a lot of lads that are always shackling about, ready for any mischief on Sundays. And then there's servant-lasses that like a walk. And there are many mothers that can't leave home; specially now when there's so much small-pox in the place."

As I returned to my lodgings I heard the schoolmaster's sharp voice addressing a lad in the true schoolmaster style. "Jacob Ashe,

didn't you hear what I told you? If you don't take yourself off I'll flog you."

"Please sir, I only . . ."

"Are you going, or are you not? Do you think we want the small-pox in the school?"

"Please, sir, I'm well again, or I wouldn't have come: it's father as is bad; and the doctor says he'll die; and mother sent me to ask the parson to come, and pray by him. Please sir to give the message, and I'll be off at once."

Before Mr. Ferrall could reply, I entered the school-close, and recognized within a yard of me the lad who had been my defender on the first day of my arrival at Roost.

"Well, my lad, what is the matter? what can I do for you?"

I had thought him sickly-looking, and underfed, when I saw him in the street a few days before, but in the hubbub of boys around me, had not noticed him very particularly. Now I saw clearly enough the marks of recent disease, and wondered at my previous want of observation.

His story was soon told. He lived down at the Moorcot Hovels; his father and mother made besoms, and rush mats; and there were six children besides himself; and they were all bad with the small-pox, except his mother and himself; he had had it, but was out of it for a week or more, and was well enough, only he

wasn't as strong as he had been. Would I come and see his father ?

"O certainly : if you'll show me the way I'll come with you at once."

The boy's face brightened, and the school-master's darkened as I made my reply.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the latter, "but you'll hardly have time to get down to the heath and back before afternoon service. It will be nearer four miles than three."

"I have an hour and three quarters," said I, looking at my watch. "And I am a good walker."

"But the small-pox, sir ; most people have such a dread of it : and you may convey the infection to the congregation."

"I shall have time to change my clothes before going to church."

"The Ashes are a very bad lot, sir. They have offended the Vicar, sir."

"So much the stronger reason why I should go to them, Mr. Ferrall."

And without waiting for a reply, I joined the boy : but I had not gone with him far before I found that my pace was too fast for him ; and I could not slacken it without running the risk of being late for church, but Jacob's directions in his own homely phrases were so intelligent, that I soon found my way to the Moorcot Ho-

vels. They were a nest of cottages down in a hollow, below the heath which skirted one side of the village, and "hovels" in the ordinary sense of the term they were not: they were substantial buildings of the stone of the country, and had evidently been constructed, in spite of their present dilapidation, at a fair outlay. Probably they had superseded some original tenements which had better deserved the designation, which had come down to a better style of building. Nevertheless the cottages before me were just of that class in which typhus and such like scourges originate, and in which the malignancy of epidemics is intensified. Small dormer windows that would not open were deep set in the thatched roofs. There was evidently but one bed-room, and one "house-place," or living room, in each cottage; and pig-styes abutted on the main buildings. Both sight and smell gave witness to a defective drainage, and the fronts of all the houses being towards the north, and their backs against the hill-side which rose rapidly behind them, they had the chilly, cheerless aspect which such a position invariably gives. One half of a double cottage, and that the smallest of the group, was the residence of the Ashes; the adjoining dwelling was untenanted,—at least so I inferred from the many broken panes

in its windows, and from a depression in the roof through which it was evident that the rain would find its way into the chamber beneath.

Within, the state of things betokened the most squalid poverty. Everything which connects itself with the notion of "cottage comforts" was absent. No cheerful fire in a brightly cleaned grate; no treasures of brass candlesticks and earthenware ornaments on the high mantel-shelf; no pictures on the walls; no show of pewter dishes, and crockery; no tall clock in the corner; no flitch of bacon hanging in its frame over head; no old-fashioned chair beside the chimney-nook; no round table, (white as the tablecloth itself from constant scrubbing,) to receive the frugal, yet sufficient meal.

On a dresser under the window lay a few dirty plates, and a basin of what I supposed, by the circles of coagulated fat on its surface, to have been cold broth, enshrined amid heaps of dirty stockings, and foul linen of all kinds. A tub with the commencement of "a wash" lying in its soapy water, stood on a stool near the dresser: there was a great black iron pot suspended above the ashes of an extinct wood fire; a form; two or three dilapidated chairs; a basket of potatoes; a heap of formidable bludgeons in a corner; and a vicious-looking, half-starved

dog, which snarled at me as I entered, was the only living creature in the room. A woman's voice from above, however, bade Ranger lie down, and invited me to come up stairs. I shall not easily forget the sight. In one corner, cut off from the rest of the room by an old baize curtain, lay, on a wretched bed, a gaunt, big-boned man, evidently dying. His wife, hardly less gaunt, held an infant, in the full eruptive stage of small-pox, to a bosom from which the supply must have been scant and unnourishing indeed. The poor soul looked worn out with anxiety, penury, and watching. In two other beds, if beds they could be called, which consisted of a flock-mattress, laid upon a stage of heather-brooms (the husband's stock-in-trade), and a single blanket, lay four children in different stages of the disease; while two more, both woefully scarred and seamed, and one, alas! blinded by that fearful malady, but in the stage of convalescence, nestled in each other's arms on a heap of "pickings," the as yet unthrashed gleanings of the last harvest.

What kindness I could, I showed; what help I had to give, I gladly offered; what ministerial functions seemed meet, I performed; but I need not set matters of that kind down here. The poor people were rugged and uncouth beyond any I had ever fallen in with before, and

I dare say were as wild, and perhaps, as Mr. Ferrall had intimated, as "bad" a lot, as any in the parish of Roost. I should guess that the poor fellow was poacher and thief whenever the temptations fell in his way, and that he loved drink and alehouse company. And his wife and children were just what might be expected with such a husband and father. And yet there was a simplicity and an earnestness about their thanks which moved me deeply :

"No distance breaks the tie of blood ;
Brothers are brothers evermore."

I felt drawn to them by the strong ties of brotherhood ; and this not the less because it was evident that words of sympathy and kindness were things to which they were so unused, that they were a matter of surprise to them. I could not help fearing that if they were bad, it was because no one had tried to gain the influence over them which would make them better. They had been treated as outcasts, and as if outcasts could have no portion in Him Who came among us for the very purpose of seeking the wanderers, and saving the lost. I do not know that this was the case : perhaps I shall find out by and by that it was otherwise ; but I note down the impression which this visit left on my mind. And one thing is clear, at any rate :

the worse they are, the stronger is their claim upon me.

Before leaving the house, I looked round it with the purpose of considering what could be done for the relief of their temporal necessities. Food and medicine are always procurable; but what I felt was, that while nine people, all more or less suffering from the effects of small-pox, (for the wife seemed to me to have the seeds of it in her,) were sleeping in one small room, there could be no thorough restoration of health for any of them, and it was obvious that the type of disease which they would communicate to their neighbours would be of the most malignant kind. The atmosphere of that wretched room was so pestilential, that I could not get the *taste* of it out of my mouth for many hours after: fire-place there was none; the window would not open; and the only ventilation was through a hole where a portion of the thatch had been blown off, and of course gave admission to rain and snow.

I asked the obvious question, "Who is your landlord?" "The Marquis," said Rachel Ashe, "all the land and houses hereabouts belong to him, I reckon; but he never sees to such matters himself: not likely. He lives up at the castle yonder; and maybe doesn't know that such poor places as these belong to him."

"I hope not!" I exclaimed, with an involuntary groan. And even as I groaned, that fearful parable came into my thoughts, and Massillon's hardly less fearful commentary upon the fate of one whose sins were simply those of omission: "*Voilà son grand crime; une vie passée dans les plaisirs de l'abondance, et dans la mollesse; voilà ce qui l'a damné.*"¹ Well, but the warning speaks to me as well as to the man on whom I am so ready to pass judgment! Perhaps I have more to answer for than he. At any rate, I know at whose door the sin of uncharitableness lies. But to go on. I inquired who it was that received the cottage rents for the Marquis.

"O, we pay our rent to Mr. Tite, the steward, that lives up by Roost Church."

To Mr. Tite, therefore, I betook myself betimes on Monday morning. The stewards of great landowners are much to be pitied. It is very much to their credit when their hearts are not altogether hardened, between their temptations on one side to be sycophants, and on the other to be tyrants. They are always seeing the weakest and the worst parts of human nature. They are the medium through which

¹ Sermon pour le jeudi de la 2de Semaine de Carême.
"Le mauvais riche."

all manner of greedy, selfish, and unreasonable requests have to be preferred to their employers, and the medium also through which their employers say "No" to many requests which are neither greedy, selfish, nor unreasonable. They have to face single-handed all sorts of shrewd attempts at imposition, and to detect neglects of duty, and wastefulness, and speculation, wherever they occur. And occur they will everywhere, if a sharp, vigilant, eye be not turned in all directions continually. A man who rises to his day's work with the conviction of matured experience that nine men out of every ten with whom he transacts business will do their best to outwit him, or drive some hard bargain, can hardly avoid growing suspicious, and doubting that anybody can act from disinterested motives. A man who is conscious to himself that in very many matters his employer must submit to be ruled by him, and who knows that his position gives him a vast amount of power over his inferiors in rank, must have trained his heart, and disciplined his temper well, if he does not grow imperious, and expect his word to be received as law.

It is a wrong thing, moreover, to judge of a man's real disposition by his outward manner. Some men affect roughness, in order to keep

improper applicants at a distance. And some who are really kind in essentials, and have warm hearts within, have a cold, repelling way with them, which makes them offend those whom they are wishing to serve.

I note these things, in order that I may not be unduly prejudiced against Mr. Tite, and may give him credit for the good points in his character. He is looked upon here as a person of the highest integrity, though somewhat obstinate, and strong in his likes and dislikes. There is no reason that I know of why he should have taken any particular liking to me, and I am rather afraid that, through my earnestness to see him before he went out, I interrupted him at his breakfast,—a thing which was, no doubt, rather irritating; but I think he was needlessly angry.

I told him who I was, and the nature of my application, which was to allow the Ashes the use of the empty cottage adjoining their own, till the illness was abated; and I further asked him to repair the thatch, and put a lattice to the bed-room window. His reply was that he had never heard such a proposal in his life, and that he wondered what he should be asked for next. He said the Ashes were a bad lot, and that he should get rid of them altogether; that he should be very glad if the old poaching

thief did die, and that the proper place for the widow and children would be the union work-house. He asked me whether I made my application with the knowledge of the Vicar, and when I replied in the negative, he declared that he was convinced of that before he put the question; that Mr. Soaper was a gentleman, and never interfered in matters which did not concern him; he advised me to take care how I compromised Mr. Soaper with the Marquis, or I should soon find that Roost would be no roosting-place for me. And that as for himself, no man living should dictate to him, and least of all, a parson.

Well, this was rude enough, but I see clearly now that I did not go to work with him judiciously. A man of more sense and experience than I have would have done better. I believe I answered him meekly, so I dare say he will harbour no resentment. At any rate, there must be two parties to a quarrel, and I will take care not to be one of them.

But now what was to be done as regards these poor Ashes? It is a sad disappointment to see no way of reducing the numbers in that crowded, pestilential room; and I feel that, in consequence, some lives will be lost. I suppose Mr. Tite's suggestion was about the best that could be made. The poor creatures *would* be

better off in the Union than where they are : but the man is in no state to be moved, and they are just the sort of people who would rather die than go into a workhouse ; the confinement would be intolerable to them.

However, one thing is clear. My start here has been unlucky. Mr. and Mrs. Ferrall have shown me unequivocally that they do not approve my ministering to patients sick of small-pox ; and certainly do not make my lodgings very comfortable to me ; but this is simply a question of doing or shirking a duty ; and the matter does not disturb me. I am not so sure as to the line I have taken with respect to Mr. Tite ; but still I acted to the best of my judgment, and have only compromised myself. Nevertheless, it is proper to apprise the Vicar of all that has taken place, and therefore I will write to him to-night ; and also, I think, to Mrs. Soaper, as perhaps from her connection with the clothing-club, to which I am to subscribe, she may be able to put me in the way of helping these poor sufferers to some sheets, and body-linen.

A week has elapsed since I have made any entry in my journal, and Christmas Day has occurred in the interval. My duties at Church and elsewhere have occupied so much of my

time, that I have not seen as much of the Ashes as I could have wished ; but I have been at the cottage four times. The father is still hovering between life and death, or rather, I should say, dying slowly, for he seems to have an iron constitution. Some of the children are better, and some worse ; but the mother, as I feared, has taken the disease, and the infant was only just alive this morning. It is beautiful to see the manner in which the boy Jacob watches over his parents, and tends them. Be the rest what they may, there is good enough in him to redeem the whole family. And his tenderness to poor little blind Jemmy,—ah ! I wish Mr. Tite could see it ! I am sure it would melt his heart. The doctor who was called in at last, and whom I met accidentally in the cottage on one occasion, said distinctly that the great severity of the malady was attributable to the circumstances under which the patients were living, and that he quite expected an unusual rate of mortality in consequence.

This conversation occurred the day after I had despatched my letters to the Soapers, and it set me upon re-considering the whole subject. The conclusion at which I arrived was this, that it was my duty, not only to the tenants, but to the landlord himself, not to

leave him in ignorance of the state of things ; and that as I had failed in my appeal to Mr. Tite, it behoved me to carry it on to his master. Perhaps the Marquis would rate me, as his steward had, for my impertinent interference, and complain of me to the Vicar. Perhaps (as present appearances suggest) he would not answer my letter. " But I must do my duty," so I said to myself, " as well as I can, and put consequences out of consideration." And thereupon, I sat down and wrote my letter, telling my tale as simply as I could. Four days have elapsed since I despatched it, but there has been no reply. Meanwhile, I have heard from the Vicar, and though his words are kind, it is not difficult to see what he thinks of me, and my proceedings in his absence.

" Brighton. Tuesday.

" DEAR MR. DOVE,

" The man who does not sympathise in the sufferings of a fellow-pilgrim, through this vale of tears (even though those sufferings should have been produced by his own misconduct,—misconduct aggravated by the crime of ingratitude) deserves the condemnation of all who are actuated by motives of philanthropy, and therefore it is needless to assure you, that your communication relating to that sad scoundrel, Isaac

Ashe, has received my full share of compassionate attention.

“In fact, my dear sir, I was never more disposed to feel for others than when your letter reached me, being myself in a state of great suffering. You know how unceasingly I am harassed by dyspepsia; and whether it was a pork pie that I fancied at Wolverton, which disagreed with me, or whether, as Mrs. Soaper thinks, I was guilty of some little indiscretion in taking dressed crab (*timballes, au velouté*) too late at night, I cannot tell, but the results were very distressing, and have quite prevented me hitherto from deriving that benefit from change of air, for which I had hoped: in fact my medical attendant quite thinks that a prolonged absence from home may be necessary.

“But I must proceed, my dear sir, to the main subject of your letter, and confess to you that it has filled me with dismay, and with the gravest apprehensions as to the probability of your ministerial success as Curate of Roost. That you should have given offence within a few days after your arrival to so influential a person as my excellent, and highly respectable friend, Mr. Tite, is a subject of the deepest distress to Mrs. Soaper and myself, and you will not be surprised to hear, that I have written to him to exonerate myself from all imputations

as being cognizant of your unfortunate application, and, so far as I could, to apologize for a step which could only have emanated from youth and inexperience. My esteem for that exemplary nobleman, the Marquis of Kingsbury, is so great, that I could not reconcile it to my principles to give my countenance to anything that would afford him a moment's annoyance, and though of course Mr. Tite is too kind-hearted to expose you to his Lordship, on account of this indiscretion, I am sure you will see the propriety of never making such an application again.

"Happily Mr. Tite is aware that Isaac Ashe and his ill-conducted family are my particular aversion. The wretched creatures have been breaking all laws, human and divine, as well as my hedges, for years past. It is notorious that the man's father was transported for sheep-stealing, and I make no doubt that Isaac is one of a gang who carried off the contents of my larder on the last Christmas Eve but one; and if it had not been for the kindness of my neighbours, I believe that on the great festival of good cheer, and general hospitality, Mrs. Soaper and I should have been obliged to dine tête-à-tête upon hasty pudding. I trust that I have as much of the spirit of Christian forgiveness as most men; but there are injuries, (and this

was one of them) which may be forgiven, but cannot be forgotten.

“And further, my dear sir, you must permit me to say, that as an elder brother in the ministry, it appears to me that the course you seem to be adopting with respect to loathsome diseases is hardly justifiable, and certainly very inexpedient,—not to say Quixotic. Of course I do not venture to prescribe to you in a matter which may be one of conscience, but I must take leave to remind you that you must expect to be excluded from all intercourse with the upper classes at Roost, if you put yourself in habitual contact with the nauseous and infectious disorders of the lower ranks. Indeed, how could I expose my beloved Martha to the risk to which she would be exposed, were I, under such circumstances to receive you at the Vicarage? I conceive that we have a duty to ourselves, and to our neighbours. And as I have no right to throw my own life away, or to be the medium of communicating disease, I decline attendance on contagious maladies upon principle. And, in fact, one could do but little good, even if one were present, as the poor creatures are almost always delirious, or stupid, or something of the kind.

“If you will go into such scenes it must be at your own proper peril; but I would advise you

always to insist on the dwellings being purified with Dr. Domdaniel Jenk's Fumigation, of Salt, Vitriol, and Cayenne Pepper, before you enter the infected houses. The vapour is very suffocating, but if the sick require your services, it is only fair to make the stipulations on which they are to be had. So let me recommend you to make that a *sine quâ non*.

"One of the most sensible women with whom I have the honour to be acquainted, and who is considered a first-rate authority in all matters of morality as well as fashion, told me no long while since, that she knew no stronger proofs of mental imbecility than are exemplified in the habit of haunting sick rooms, alluding to the approach of death, or speaking of the dead. Without going all lengths with my strong-minded friend, I think her sentiments sufficiently striking to be submitted to your consideration.

"I am sure, my dear Sir, you will receive my suggestions in the spirit in which they are offered, and believe in the sincere regard with which I subscribe myself,

"Your very faithful and obliged Servant,

"SEPTIMUS SOAPER.

"P.S.—I regret to say, that upon perusing your letter, I felt constrained to lay an embargo.

on your communication to Mrs. Soaper. Not knowing to what extent contagion may be conveyed through the post-office, I was obliged to commit your letter to the flames unopened ; a circumstance I much regret, as I have no doubt it contained matter well worthy of perusal."

CHAPTER V.

THE GROWTH OF EXPERIENCE.

"Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice: his reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them; and when you have them, they are not worth the search."

The Merchant of Venice.

I WAS busy writing my sermon: my sitting-room door was open, for, in fact, I could never close it without being half-stifled with smoke, and I was conscious of hearing steps on the stairs, and in the room, but I did not look up, for I assumed that Mrs. Ferrall was come to lay the table-cloth for dinner, till, on receiving a slap on the back, I saw, to my great delight, Harry Harley standing at my side. Before, however, I could give him the welcome that rose to my lips, I observed through the haze another person standing in the doorway,—an elderly man with white hair, and, as I soon remarked, with a kind expression of countenance,

and a shy manner. "Why, Dove, how are you?" cried Harry, shaking my hand, and looking in my face with a glance which made me feel that there was some mischievous joke in the background. "I've unearthed you at last, you see; and what is more, I have brought you a visitor who expresses himself anxious to be introduced to you. This is the Marquis of Kingsbury."

"Who has great pleasure in making Mr. Dove's acquaintance, and who has taken the liberty of calling to thank him for his kindness. Mr. Dove, you are a young man, and I am an old one, and so you must not be offended with me for telling you that you have written me a very proper letter,—a very admirable letter, very wise and good."

"I have rather to say how glad I am that your Lordship has not taken offence at my boldness; but I can assure you that I tried to do as I would have been done by. I believed that, were I in your Lordship's position, I should be glad to be apprised of circumstances of this sort."

"And I, Mr. Dove, putting myself in your position, can well understand how much the effort to do as you have done would cost you. So now, I hope, we understand one another, and that you will have no hesitation in telling

me your wishes, giving me credit for the desire to do right, whether we agree or disagree. What do you want me to do?"

"Were the disease not so infectious, I would ask you to judge of the state of things by inspection."

"You may be easy, Mr. Dove, on that score. I have had the small-pox; and I will take good care when I get home that there shall be no risk from my clothes, though I suspect that a ride of six miles in the teeth of such a westerly gale as blows this morning will remove all risk on that score. Will you go with me to the spot?"

"Most willingly, my Lord, but the atmosphere of the house is very horrible: you should not go upon an empty stomach. May I offer you . . ."

How to finish the sentence I knew not, for it flashed across me that the owner of Thorswoldestone Castle would not be able to eat anything that I had to offer him. I think he saw what was passing through my mind, for he said instantly, "I never eat anything at this time of day but a crust of bread."

I rang the bell, and as ill luck would have it, Mrs. Ferrall, who had not admitted my guests, and did not know they were in the room, (for the door was now shut, and the apartment fast

filling with smoke,) made her appearance with my dinner; a plate of bread, a plate of potatoes, a yeast dumpling, and a bottle of water. I am vexed to think how much false shame I felt that the nakedness of the land should be so thoroughly exposed to a stranger. And Harry did not help matters, for he exclaimed, "Why here's your dinner, Dove. No chance of empty stomachs now?"

My appealing glance was wasted on him: perhaps the density of the smoke prevented his seeing it, or the articles of food which were placed on the table; but while I was asking Mrs. Ferrall for some more plates, and a new loaf, if she had one, he rattled on about luxurious bachelors, and creature comforts. He was quiet enough when he saw the true state of things, and I believe as a penance took his share of the dumpling, which was heavy as lead, and looked, if it did not smell, like putty. It was not till the hasty meal was despatched, and we were moving to the door, that he whispered in my ear, "I beg your pardon, old fellow; I am really very sorry," and then said aloud, "So these are the apartments which the Screw and Screwess have allotted you. I don't wonder now that you were in such a hurry to accept the Curacy of Roost."

"Well, they are not particularly cheerful,

and the smoky chimney is a nuisance, but I dare say I shall get on very well."

"What do you think," said he, turning to Lord Kingsbury, "of my writing a letter of expostulation to the Vicar as to the nature of the tenement in which he houses his Curate? The fashion that Dove himself has set ought to be followed in his own case: ought it not?"

It was said so gravely that at first I did not perceive that Harry was jesting, and the earnestness of my negative produced a hearty laugh at my expense; but I thought it made the Marquis kinder to me than even he was before.

We soon reached the Moorcot hovels. Harry was not allowed to approach them, but the Marquis, taking my arm, desired me to lead him into the house,—not, however, before he had fixed his quick eye on the dilapidated thatch, and reeking filth of pigstyes and cess-pools, and had muttered to himself, "Too bad; too bad!"

It was a grievous sight within. Death had done his work. An old woman, sent from the workhouse by way of nurse, (though more needing to be nursed herself than fit to nurse others,) raised a dirty coverlid with which she had hidden, so far as she could, from the eyes of the widowed mother, the corpses of Isaac Ashe and

his infant child. Anything more hideous than the aspect of the man, gaunt and wasted, with the face blotched and yellow, a blue-black beard of some weeks' growth, an only half-closed mouth, and a couple of pebbles laid over the sunken eyeholes, I never saw; the contrast with the calm, sweet, innocent face of the infant made it more awful still, for the poor fellow's countenance retained in death the impress it gained in life from the brutalizing effects of low cunning and dissipation. My companion shuddered, and a groan escaped his lips: but he had come resolved to see things with his own eyes, and he saw all leisurely: spoke kindly to the children in turn, and specially to poor Jacob, who seemed almost stupified with grief as he watched his mother picking at the bed-clothes, and muttering to herself unceasingly, quite unconscious of our presence.

"Can I see the adjoining cottage?" he asked, as we left the house. I replied that it was locked. He went up to the window, and inspected its interior through some of the broken quarries. "Is the disease in any of the other cottages?" he inquired.

"One is occupied," I replied, "by a very aged couple, who were not likely to take the infection, and have escaped: it has visited the three other houses."

"Then I shall run no risk of conveying the malady, if I visit them?"

"None whatever," I replied.

"Then I should wish to see them," and in turn he inspected them, asking for permission to do so with as much courtesy as if the inmates were his equals, and taking off his hat as simply when he crossed the threshold, as he would if he had been entering his own house,—a circumstance which I note, because it put me to shame. I am conscious that I have sometimes entered a poor man's house as if I conferred an obligation on him by entering it at all.

When all was done, he took my arm without saying a word, and walked on silently for a couple of hundred yards. Then he turned round, and facing me, took my hand and shook it. He was very pale, and tears were standing in his eyes. "Mr. Dove," he said, "I thank God that I have seen this; and I thank you for having led me to see it. You have done the kindest office that one man could do by another. I trust I have learned a lesson to-day which will last me my life. God forgive me for my past omissions! All this shall be amended."

Then, though his mind was evidently pre-occupied, he changed the subject, and talked on indifferent matters till we came up to Harry

Harley. "T'other side of me, Master Harry, if you please," he exclaimed, "or my Lady Kingsbury will say that I am not fit to be trusted with you; and though, to do her justice, she has as few weaknesses as any woman I know, she has more prudence and common sense than most. So let the wind blow to me from you, not from me to you, till we get upon our horses, and then we will have a gallop over the heath before we return to the Castle. I must see Tite before I go home. And while I am having my interview with him, you two can have a chat together. Before I leave you, however, I must lay my injunctions on you, Harry, to make arrangements with Mr. Dove to come and pay us a visit. All times are the same to us; but perhaps it will be more agreeable to him to come to us while you and the General are staying with us."

Nothing could be more kind than this: and I could not but fear that it would seem very ungracious to meet such an invitation with a decided negative, but instinct, which I believe sometimes helps me when reason has only doubtful suggestions to offer, told me without hesitation that I must say "No." Had I sat down and reflected I should have got puzzled. I should have doubted whether pride and morbid sensibility, arising from my altered circum-

stances in life, were not the motives which were inducing me to a refusal. I should have got bewildered in the investigation as to what was due to the social position of our great landowner, and how far I should be justified in throwing away a chance of influencing him for good, and of interesting him in the condition of my parishioners. So it was well that I had to give my decision on the instant; and I just told the simple truth. I said that I felt that I ought to give up my whole time to the work of making myself acquainted with Roost and its inhabitants, and that my absence from home would be wrong at a time when so much sickness was prevailing. And then I added that being no longer in the position of life in which I was born, and having an invalid mother more or less dependent upon me, I had thought it better to submit to my lot unreservedly, and abstain altogether from taking the place in society to which my education and our condition before my father's ruin would have entitled me, and so avoid altogether many snares, temptations, and expenses. I ventured to add the hope that he would approve my decision, and believe that if anything could have induced me to alter it, it would be the extreme kindness I had received from him.

To that kindness he added greatly by the

consideration he showed in not pressing me further, and he ended by saying that he honoured me: which was distressing, because it made me suspect that after all I might have been actuated by some secret motive which, if laid bare, would rather have deserved contempt. However, my thoughts were speedily turned into another channel, for just as we turned into the main street of the village we came full upon Mr. Tite. Why I should have turned scarlet, and felt overwhelmed with confusion I know not, for certainly I had not said one word in my letter to Lord Kingsbury which could convey the smallest suspicion that his steward had behaved uncourteously: but if Mr. Tite had detected me picking his pocket, I could have hardly felt more guilty. I believe I started so that Lord Kingsbury, who had his arm on mine, dropped it, and inquired if anything was the matter. How Mr. Tite was looking, I know not, but I suppose from what Harry said afterwards, that he was confused too. I hope he did not think I had been taking any unfair advantage of him. Of course I took care to show that I owed him no grudge for his rough words, which after all, most probably only emanated from zeal for his employer's service; as soon as I recovered my self-possession, I greeted him kindly, and shook hands with him; but there

was no more conversation, for Lord Kingsbury said, "Tite, I was on my way to your office, or rather to your garden,—for I must keep in the open air. Young ladies," (this was addressed to some ladies whom I recognized as having been seated in the steward's pew, but to whom I had not been introduced,) "I hope you will forgive me for carrying off your father, just, I fear, as he was going out to walk with you, but I have a matter of business to mention to him which will not bear delay. Harry, I will call for you at Mr. Dove's lodgings. Good-bye, Mr. Dove. I hope we shall often meet. Tite, take care that Mr. Dove has the keys of the park gates."

So we parted; Lord Kingsbury and his steward going one way; the ladies another; Harry and I a third.

I suppose some remains of my old confusion was clinging to me, for I walked on hastily without speaking for some fifty yards, and I don't know that I should have spoken then, for the events of the last three hours had been just like a dream, if it had not been for Harry, who to my horror began to whistle with an energy unusual even with him, his tormenting tune, "Merrily danced the Quaker's wife!"

"O, Harry!" I exclaimed, "don't whistle that!"

“Don’t whistle it! why it’s the best friend you have in the world. A single bar of it will at any time bring you out of the brownest study into which you have obfuscated yourself. What a fellow you are! you haven’t seen me these six weeks; you didn’t know but what I was abroad, parleyvous-ing the mounseers. You see me arrive unexpectedly at the most charming abode that ever was devised by a Screw and Screwess; I introduce you to the great man of the county, whom the Screw and Screwess would give their ears to be on familiar terms with, only he can’t abide them; I ate putty to hide your confusion when you are detected in the very act of starving yourself; I stood patiently on a bleak heath for an hour in the very teeth of a nor’-wester, while you were enlightening the Marquis on the subjects of plague, pestilence, and famine, and doing your best to infect him with the smallpox; and now, when all is over, and I expect some handsome remuneration for my services, you won’t even speak to me. Upon my word, I believe you are in love with one or other of those Miss Tites.”

“Harry, how can you? I never spoke to one of them. I don’t even know their names. I never saw them except in Church; and I can’t help seeing them there, for they sit just under the reading-desk.”

“Ah! now the murder is out: just what I expected: she,—the sandy haired one you know, with the least possible cast in her eye, was so struck with your delivery, that she fixed one optic on her hassock, and the other on you, till you were fairly (or unfairly) fascinated. Well, old fellow, I congratulate you! You’re a ‘done ‘coon’ and no mistake. She’s a slashing gal as ever I saw in my life. The only thing that makes me uncomfortable about her is her bonnet. To judge by the amount of flowers in that, I should judge that before she saw you she must have set her mind upon winning a market-gardener. Her head looks like one of those ‘designs in flowers’ that carries off the silver cream-jug at a Horticultural Show. But mark my words, you’ll drive the market gardener out of the field, and Sophy,—I’m sure her name is Sophy, (it was a Sophy that took up with a market-gardener in one of Dickens’ books, wasn’t it?) will be Mrs. Dove. I don’t know what the Screw and Screwess will say: I hope you have not jilted their beloved Martha, the Oyster Patty, as my father calls her;—Oyster, you see, because she always keeps her mouth shut, except when she is eating;—I hope Miss Soaper is not an ill-used woman: but you are wise in your generation. I should think that the Screw had a good long purse of his

own, and his discourses, like the Archbishop of Granada's, have a flavour of apoplexy about them: but old Tite is the man, depend upon it! 'Fast bind, fast find' is impressed in every wrinkle of his ugly face. I should say that he appropriates ninepence in every shilling that passes through his hands. Stick to Sophy, Mr. Dove, and your fortune is made."

"Have you done, Harry?"

"Why yes, for the present."

"I hope you are greatly relieved by the ebullition; but for my own part I must say that I am quite ashamed of you. When will you give up these silly, teasing ways? They quite vex me."

"No, they don't, old fellow. They refresh you, and do you a world of good."

I could not help laughing at his whimsical face, and so further expostulation was out of the question. I only said "you really are growing too old for such nonsense."

"O you are going to sing that song, are you? I can't think what is come to all my friends. A few months ago the general was always talking of me as 'that boy,' and he thought it 'very desirable that I should have the benefit of a continental tour before I arrived at manhood.' I thought I had arrived at manhood when I came of age. I know all the speechifying at

the fêtes on that remarkable occasion seemed to turn upon the interesting fact, that a razor had become indispensable, and that whiskers of any dimensions might be had to order. All of a sudden the wind changed ; my uncle the ambassador made me his heir, after poor Lady Harley ; and the Lord Lieutenant of the county grew very anxious to see me connected with the Harleyford Troop of Yeomanry. Within a fortnight, the general hinted something about moustaches ; (nota bene : he had snubbed the incipient down two years before as energetically as if he had been a college tutor”

“Thank you, Harry.”

“Make yourself easy, old fellow, I wasn't thinking of you : don't flatter yourself. Well, the next day, the general begins a set speech with ‘my dear boy,’ and then, of malice prepense, corrects himself into ‘my dear Harry ;’ and forthwith enlarges on the pleasures and responsibilities of the toga virilis ; talks of the importance of my future position in the county ; knocks the project of Paris and Rome on the head, with the quiet suggestion that they would form pleasant items in a brief matrimonial tour ; hints obscurely a seat in parliament, if an object of ambition, might be procured for me ; and, in short, brings matters to a climax by nearly doubling my allowance. More won-

derful than all, old Stubbs the butler, who had Master-Harryed me up to that moment, and occasionally treated me as if I were a school-boy whom he suspected of stealing apples, now exhibited the most formal respect, invoked me as 'Mr. Harley,' and invited me to send for another bottle of claret."

"Well, my dear Harry, this is all right enough; and no more than your due. Do yourself justice, and you are equal to any position to which you may be called."

"Bosh!"

"I never flattered you, Harry."

"No, I know that, old fellow. Your compliments were often of the ugliest. I dare say it is all true; Lord Kingsbury said just the same thing in his kind, quiet, way; and so did my lady in her most sensible and majestic manner. One must grow old, I know that; but nobody, I suppose, likes the process. And I have been a boy so long, and liked being a boy so much, that the inevitable change comes like a great bore. And yet . . ."

"Well?"

"Why, in some things I see that a change would be better. My father is not as strong as he was, and since my poor mother's death, Harleyford has been very dull for him; he is fond of female society; and if . . . if, in short,

I were ever to marry, things might be very different, and more comfortable for him."

"Yes, I see," said I, "and I think you cannot do better; for I am sure you are not one of those who will marry in haste, to repent at leisure. And now tell me, how long you stay at Thorswoldestone Castle?"

"I don't exactly know," replied Harry, hesitatingly, "but I shall not leave it for some days I believe."

"You never wrote me a line, or told me you were coming there."

"No. I haven't used you well; but to tell you the truth, I have had a great many things to think of lately; and I have been rather unsettled, and . . . but don't let us talk any more about me to-day; I want to know how you are getting on here. I don't like the looks of anything I have seen yet, I can tell you, Mr. Dove; and you will please to remember, as I told you before, that I am your Bishop."

"Is it with me that your Lordship is about to find fault?"

"Partly so, Mr. Dove. I see very clearly the condition in which you will be when you have lived for a year in this cheerful and salubrious abode on eighty pounds per annum. I shall write to your mother, sir, about you."

"For heaven's sake," I exclaimed, "my dear Harry, do nothing of the kind. I would not let her have a moment's anxiety about me for any consideration."

"You admit then that she *would* be anxious if she could see you just as you are at this moment."

"Well, I intend to see what can be done with that smoky chimney; and I mean to have the ceiling whitewashed. And then the room will be well enough. If I am likely to remain here, and if my mother's health should improve, perhaps I may look out for some small house in Roost, which would contain us all."

"If you do, mark my words, the Vicar will grow jealous of you, and Mrs. Soaper will be jealous of your mother, and Miss Martha will be jealous of your cousin."

"Impossible! What room could there be for jealousy?"

"None whatever, but they would be jealous for all that. The better you fulfil your duties, the less Mr. Soaper will like it. He wishes to be the most important man in Roost, without character or exertion to give him the influence which would make him important. Mrs. Soaper perturbs herself with the imagination that every woman is in love with her husband, while she believes that all male admiration is due to her-

self. I have heard a great deal more about these folks than I knew before, since we have been at the Castle ; and what I have heard does not tend to make me rejoice in your being Curate of Roost,—at least for your own sake.”

“ You mustn’t judge the elder generation of clergy by our modern notions of what the clerical standard ought to be. Mr. Soaper belongs to the old school, which was not distinguished for activity, but which had merits of its own, which are too apt to be overlooked. One can’t expect to have everything to one’s liking. I shall do well enough here.”

“ Not if you work hard, and discharge your duties energetically.”

“ O that is only to be expected. The devil, you know . . .”

“ I beg your pardon for interrupting you, but I am not talking of the devil, but of your Mr. Soaper. Lord Kingsbury declares that he has put more impediments in the way of improvement at Roost, than all the rest of the parish put together ; and that he has driven every decent curate he ever had into resignation.”

“ Perhaps the faults have not been altogether on the Vicar’s side,” said I.

“ No, I dare say not ; but Lord Kingsbury is not a man that speaks at random. And I can tell you this, old fellow, that I never saw a

man better pleased in my life than he was with your letter. He knew nothing about you; had never heard of your being come to Roost; but he showed it to Mr. Sydney of Sunnymede who was staying at the Castle, (charming old man that Mr. Sydney! one of the old parsons, for he's above fourscore; but they say as active as the youngest of you, and more deeply read than many of even the most learned in his profession; I hope you'll make his acquaintance, if it be only to look at his parsonage and his village;—it would do your heart good to see the view from his study, with the Cleaver Hills in the distance; and the village,—of which, all I will say is that it is as unlike Roost, as anything you can imagine.) Well, Mr. Sydney said that the man that wrote that letter, be he who he might, was made of the right stuff, and that if, as he inferred, you were a young man, it gave the highest promise of your future”

“Harry, do you remember your reply just now, when I told you that you would be equal, if you chose, to any duties to which you might be called?”

“No.”

“But I do: and, pace Henrici, I shall apply it to yourself.—‘*Bosh!*’”

“Ah, but in your case, old fellow, it is *not* bosh; but just the truth.”

“Well then, Harry, let it lie, like truth, at the bottom of a well. Let us forget all about it, and talk of some more profitable subject. I want to know about Mr. Sydney. Who is he?”

“I believe he was a very intimate friend of the last Lord Kingsbury, who gave him the living. Sunnymede, you know, is the parish in which Thorswoldestone Castle is situated,—the Castle lies at the top of the hill, and Sunnymede in the valley below : such a quiet nook ; the still waters of the Brent winding through fat meadows, skirted by noble woods, with purple hills for a background. I don’t believe that Mr. Sydney was ever directly concerned with the education of the present lord ; but I should think that he, more than any one else, had given him principles, and made him what he is.”

“And what is that, Harry?”

“Why one of the most conscientious men I ever fell in with. A shy, reserved man till you know him, but one who seems to me to be always thinking of others, never of himself ; and whose heart’s desire, I do believe, is, to use his means and influence, for the good of those among whom he lives. You must not judge of him by what you see here at Roost. I suspect that that Tite, to serve his own purposes, has kept him very much in the dark as to the state

of things in this place; and I know that Mr. Soaper has again and again been an impediment in his way,—not by direct opposition,—(your Vicar, I suspect, would never quarrel with a Marquis,) but by the wily tactics of delay, and plausible hints of inexpediency, and all that sort of humbug.”

“What do you think he will do about those Moorcot Hovels?”

“Nay, I know not. I don’t know what ought to be done: but whatever that is, he will do. You were disappointed because you thought he said little? *I* thought that (for him) he said a great deal. He promised that what was wrong should be amended. He is not one who commits himself to a hasty opinion. And he may not be very rapid in forming his judgment: but when he once sees his way, nothing will turn him: you may be easy on that score. He is none of your weak great men, who are talked over in five minutes by their agents. He has a head and a will of his own. And I suspect that you have unwittingly fired a train which will blow Mr. Tite out of the water. If Tite had known you as I do, he never would have been guilty of the mistake of refusing to do anything to those cottages, which I feel pretty sure he did, and did, (if I judged rightly by his looks and your own, when you met just

now,) in some singularly offensive manner. Now wasn't it so?"

"Never mind what took place between us, Harry. You saw we were on very good terms, didn't you?"

"I saw that you looked so very much ashamed and distressed, that I naturally inferred (knowing you as I do) that you were ashamed and distressed for him. Well, you have had your revenge, if he was saucy; you may rely upon that."

"Don't say such a thing, Harry. I have nothing to revenge."

"No, no, old fellow, I quite understand that. I was only speaking hypothetically: and all I meant to infer was that if he *did* knock you down, and if, in consequence, you shook his hand just now as heartily as if he were your dearest friend, still his Nemesis will overtake him. 'Raro antecedentem scelestum;' et cætera, et cætera. The old rogue will smart for it. He will find that he has done worse than a crime, —made a mistake. Lord Kingsbury has seen those Moorcot Hovels with his own eyes: and consequently his eyes are opened; and henceforth he will never rest till he has probed the existing evils among his cottage-tenantry at Roost to the bottom. Probably Tite has his strong likes and dislikes, and is a huge tyrant where

he imagines himself irresponsible. It is the way with many of his class, and there is often considerable temptation that way, no doubt. But he has roused a lion. Lord Kingsbury has made the discovery that his agent has been guilty of a very gross neglect, and Tite will stand in a different position from henceforth. He and Soaper, when this affair gets abroad, will not love you any the better : you must lay your account for that : and perhaps they will lay their heads together to bowl you out, and make Roost too hot to hold you, (I rather hope they may, old fellow !) but you will have the satisfaction of feeling that you have inaugurated a sanitary revolution at any rate. And for my own part, I should not like to have had the things said to me, which I have not the smallest doubt that the Marquis has been pouring into his steward's ears for the last half hour. But there he is coming down the street. I will go and meet him. Fare you well, and don't live upon putty, there's a good fellow ! I have no doubt that a little goes a great way, and that it is very satisfying, but I do doubt its digestibility."

So ended the visit ; and when the excitement of the day was over, I began to fancy that Harry had taken rather an exaggerated view of the commotion which he supposed me to have stirred : but within two days I found workmen busy

preparing the empty cottage at Moorcot for the Ashes; and within a week I received the following letter from my Vicar.

“ Brighton, Monday.

“ DEAR MR. DOVE,

“ I had not intended troubling you with a letter after so short an interval, and the symptoms of heartburn and general acidity which I experience for some hours in the forenoon are so distressing, that I should gladly excuse myself from correspondence; but intelligence has reached me from Roost which has created so much disquietude, and indeed alarm, in the breasts of myself and my family, that I feel bound to make the exertion, and communicate with you at once, for my sentiment is that the man who with a chance of preventing evil of any kind, shrinks from making the effort, through unwillingness to sacrifice his personal comfort, can never expect to be reckoned, (as I hope when I descend to my quiet grave that I shall be reckoned,) among the benefactors of my kind.

“ It has come to my knowledge that in what I fear I must call your preposterous predilection for those ill-conditioned Ashes, you have quite forgotten all that is due to myself, to the parishioners of Roost, and the public in general.

You have taken upon yourself to make calumnious insinuations against one of the most upright and intelligent men that ever managed a nobleman's affairs; you have prejudiced that nobleman against his old and valued servant; you have gone far to cause a temporary estrangement between them; and worse than all, you have exposed that nobleman's life, and the lives of every individual in the princely establishment at Thorswoldestone, to infection from the most hideous and loathsome disease which afflicts humanity. Nay more, you have set the commonest dictates of prudence and precaution at defiance; and although you had received from me the fullest instructions as to the use of Dr. Domdaniel Jenk's fumigation, I understand that you introduced the Marquis of Kingsbury into the pestilential atmosphere of small-pox, without any previous care to disinfect the air.

"Words, my dear sir, cannot express the disappointment and dismay in which this sad news has plunged us, nor the pain with which we have seen our visions of confidence in your taste and judgment vanish like the morning dew.

"I can assure you that the nervous attack which my daughter has experienced on hearing of the risk to which her beloved friend,

Lady Adeliza Fazakerly has been exposed, has been so severe that we have been obliged to call in medical advice.

"I am so agitated that all my own ailments will, I have no doubt, be much aggravated. Still, I am anxious to do justice, and am most anxious, my dear sir, that you should, if possible, exculpate yourself.

"Is it possible that such charges can be true? I pause for a reply.

"And yet, even while I hope against hope, my heart misgives. There can be no doubt that you have taken the highly improper course (for one in your position,) of intruding yourself upon a nobleman of the highest rank, by initiating an uninvited correspondence with him; and that you are leaving no stone unturned by which you may worm yourself into his good graces.

"Alas! I blush for such sycophancy, and must take leave to assure you that of all contemptible creatures on the face of the earth, he is the most contemptible who seeks to rise by flattering his superiors, who affects intimacies with great people, and who, in short, is a time-server and a toad-eater.

"Another point there is, with respect to which there can be no mistake.

"I am credibly informed that when you

met Mr. Tite and his family, you were overwhelmed with shame and confusion (which, considering how you had been trying to injure him behind his back, must have been the case with any one, not actually hardened in wickedness), but that when, recovering yourself under his friendly salutation, you passed on, you actually glared on his daughters with a most morose aspect.

“*Morose!* Yes, my dear sir, ‘morose’ was the word employed: and what a word as descriptive of a man’s manner towards any, even the plainest, of the fair creatures who rule our destinies!

‘O woman, in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou.’

Morose! And to the Misses Tite! I solemnly declare that I consider Miss Juliana one of the sweetest girls that ever stepped in shoe-leather! Morose! I cannot write it without a shudder. Why you must be actuated by the very spirit of Saint Senanus, of whom the Irish melodist rhymes so charmingly! Really, my dear sir, if you treat the sex in this way, you will lose all moral influence over your parishioners; and however painful it may be to my feelings as Vicar of Roost to say it, I must tell you plainly that I shall look on you as nothing less than a

cockerbundy. Now if I were you, and wished to be particularly killing, I would alter all this. You seem to be on a wrong tack. Make your body dark all over, except the tail, which should be yellowish. Let your dubbing be of black-brown fur, ribbed over with gold twist, and a red capon's hackle over all. Then, with the grey feathers of a mallard for wings, and two horns at your head made of the hairs of a squirrel's tail, you will do great execution. In fact, after thirty years' experience in the art of entrapping the innocent, I will undertake to say that you will, in such guise, be an irresistible whirling-dun (a much better name, by the way, than cockerbundy) in the evening twilight, to any loose fish that are to be had on any terms.

"But I really must not run on any longer. I have a young ape of a Curate who has been making an ass of himself, and I must give him a proper jobation by to-day's post. What bores these animals are!

"We are all pretty bobbish. Think of old Chalkstone's Madeira selling at the rate of five shillings a glass. I secured half-a-dozen bottles, which was all I could afford in these hard times. The Dean is here: rather shaky on his pins, and very purple about the gills: but he still contrives to peck a little. He gave us a blow-

out on Saturday, and I do assure you that the filets de perdreaux sautés à la Lucullus were the most superb things you can imagine. Fare you well: and may appetite wait on digestion!

“Ever thine, my dear Bob, most sincerely,

“SEPTIMUS SOAPER.”

I confess that when I read this letter I thought that my senses were taking leave of me. That the Vicar should make such a termination to a letter so commenced seemed so impossible, that I was lost in amazement. Yet there could be no mistake. The beginning of the letter spoke for itself; and strange as the end of it was, my name is Robert, and therefore how could I doubt that I was the “Bob” to whom he addressed himself? I read and re-read the document, and the more I read it, the more was I distressed at the commencement of it, and the more I was bewildered at its close. Perhaps, I thought, at last, the familiarity of the conclusion is intended as a salve for the asperity of the earlier portion; but then I noticed, for the first time, that the two first sheets (which were evidently and unmistakeably addressed to myself) were written upon very common straw paper, while the last was upon “super-satin note,” smooth as polished ivory, and almost as thick as card.

The truth flashed upon me. In spite of his care to adapt his paper to his correspondents, Mr. Soaper had inclosed a sheet in my letter which was never intended for my eye; and I had most unluckily perused what was designed for another person.

CHAPTER VI.

MORE KICKS THAN HALFPENCE.

"I will drain him dry as hay :
Sleep shall, neither night nor day,
Hang upon his pent-house lid ;
He shall live a man forbid :
Weary seven-nights, nine times nine,
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine :
Though his bark can not be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost."

Macbeth.

TEN months have elapsed since my journal has seen any entry on its pages beyond the amount of parish work got through day by day, and the texts of the sermons written, and the names of the books read. As regards the latter point, I am terribly behind-hand. No progress in Hebrew ; and not a line of Greek since the beginning of summer. The journal is of no great consequence, its place has been well occupied by the daily letter to my dear mother, to whom my correspondence seems a great solace. If it is out of the question that she should come

here, (and the Vicar and Mrs. Soaper set their faces so vigorously against it on the ground that my time would be spent in waiting on an invalid, that I hardly can entertain a further hope on the subject) it is clearly my duty to supply the void produced by this lengthened separation as fully as I can ; yet I often find it difficult to avoid putting things in my letters which will reveal that matters here are not very comfortable, and communicating my own depression of spirits to her. I ought to have made some stipulation with the Vicar as to holydays, before I undertook the Curacy. He now tells me that I had full knowledge of the delicate state of his health, and that it was unreasonable on my part to expect leave of absence ; that he cannot grant any now, nor can he name a time when he will.

I must be patient therefore. It is a cross, no doubt, but how much heavier would it be, if my mother's state of health had been growing worse ; if there was any increased anxiety about her ; or if Mary were not with her. I dare say that some day it will come into the Vicar's mind that Curates need occasional relaxation as well as incumbents, or perhaps something may set him thinking of his own mother, and then he will volunteer to give me a holyday. I believe I should do my work

better, for I am getting rather knocked up. It has been a year of hard work. I have had to make myself acquainted with the people here, and there has been so much sickness, that I have been on my legs, for the most part, all day long. And I have had to sit up late at night in order to prepare for my ordination to the Priesthood. I expected that when the Soapers came back from Brighton I should have more leisure, but the event has been altogether different. I suppose it is some aggravated form of dyspepsia that makes him irritable, and hard to please, if, which is most likely, the fault is not altogether in myself. But somehow or other, he seems never to have forgiven me for having made acquaintance with the Marquis of Kingsbury without his intervention. He has recurred to it again and again, and almost takes the repairs which have been carried out at the Moorcot Hovels, as a personal injury. Such people as the Ashes, he says, ought to have been let to lie on the bed they had made for themselves: their wretched condition was only a fitting punishment for a fellow who had poached lands and fished waters which Mr. Soaper himself had hired at a considerable yearly expense. My suggestion that the offender was now in his grave, and that it would be better to reclaim his surviving family than

to punish them by letting them linger on in disease and filth, gave him so much offence that I had no other course left than to remain silent. I really think that he lays it at my door that six months after the Marquis's visit to Roost Mr. Tite had a paralytic seizure, and has since resigned his agency. Mr. Soaper declares that it was anxiety of mind which brought on the seizure, and that he had never known anxiety till the Marquis began the sanitary inspection of his cottages at Roost, and had the land drained, and pigstyes removed, and doors and windows opened, and tiled roofs substituted for thatch, and the improvements made which are still in progress, and the sight of which always puts the Vicar out of humour.

There is no means of repelling a charge of this sort, even if it were worth while. It is impossible to prove a negative. All I know is, that Mr. Tite hunted three days a week to the end of the season, and that even if the course I took had any effect in impairing his health, I should not have done my duty if I had adopted any other. What is right must be done, and consequences must be left to the ordering of Providence.

But why do I write in this strain? If the year has brought with it its share of trials and anxieties, (and who is safe for a moment with-

out them ?) it has been accompanied with the greatest blessings. It has seen me fairly landed in the profession on which my heart has been long set : it has placed me in a field of work in which there is very much to learn, and in which there is very much to discipline me, and to brace me in all those points in which I am full of infirmity and weakness. I have received a great deal of kindness, and I have found a friend where I most desired to find one, in the Bishop of Chadsminster.

I am not sure, indeed, that his having noticed me has not rather increased than diminished my difficulties here, but I feel that whatever my difficulties may be, I can turn to him as really being a "Father in God." They say that now-a-days a Bishop's only care is not to commit himself; that he will be ready enough to censure any of his clergy who take the unpopular side of any question, and subject themselves to the railing accusations of the newspapers, but that as to advising them how to act in doubtful cases, or throwing the shield of his authority over them in order to protect them, it is what he dare not do. I have heard it declared that the invariable answer of a Bishop to one that seeks his counsel is this: 'You must do what you think best, and when you have done it, I will tell you whether I approve it or no.' Not

such a prelate is he who presides over the diocese of Chadsminster !

If ever a man entered his diocese without friends, or interest, a man who might be snubbed without any fears of his resenting it, or arbitrarily extinguished,—as Bishops can extinguish curates,—without any probability of an appeal to justice or equity, it was myself. And yet from the moment I became connected with his diocese, he made me feel that he took a paternal interest in me. He gave me the promise that he would keep his eye upon me, and he faithfully kept it. He had a long conversation with me about Roost, and how I was getting on, when I was at the Palace before the last Ordination ; when he was staying at Thorswoldestone Castle in the summer he rode over, and called upon me ; and he spoke to me very kindly at the Visitation. Whether, in consequence of what he saw here he wrote anything to the Vicar, I have no means of knowing, but I rather suspect it. He was not pleased with these lodgings, or with the school, or with the state of the Church, or with the paucity of the services,—things which he saw with his own eyes, or matters into which he inquired ; he questioned me very closely as to changes which I wished to make, but to which the Vicar would not consent, and some of them he desired me to

announce to the Vicar that he had insisted on. I have noticed that these have been very sore subjects ever since, and it has been hinted by Mrs. Soaper that "some people know how to curry favour with Bishops at the expense of other people." Poor lady, I think she expected me to be overwhelmed with confusion, but I could not summon up even enough of guilty feeling to make me blush. One thing I confess has vexed and disappointed me very much. The Vicar has refused me the use of the school-room for a night-school. All I asked for was the apartment. I was willing to take all the labour single-handed, and to make it clear that the experiment was altogether my own, and that no precedent was set up. Nothing can be more melancholy than the state of the lads and young men in this parish. With nothing to do, and no one to look after them, who can wonder that they take to idle, dissolute, ways? And many of them can neither read nor write. A night-school was the very remedy for the evil. And many,—among them Jacob Ashe,—were eager to avail themselves of such an advantage, and promised to attend as soon as harvest was over. The room, in which I now write, will not hold more than half a dozen persons, and to invite lads to sit for two or three hours in the smoke, would be to offer that, which

putting myself in their circumstances, I should hardly care to accept. Wearied with twelve hours of hard labour, the poor fellows have a right to expect some little comfort. What to do for them I see not. To hire a room would look like flying in the Vicar's face. To let these lads perish for lack of knowledge, and settle down into habits of vice, is what I cannot, and must not do. The one idea that seems to predominate in the Vicar's mind is the dread lest more should be expected of *him*, if his curate undertakes more work than has been the fashion in Roost. He is, (I hope I do not misjudge him, but we have all our infirmities) jealous lest the curate should obtain more influence than himself; and yet he does not see that nothing is so likely to exalt the curate in the opinion of the people as their believing that the Vicar is the obstacle in the way of parochial improvement. I really believe that I consult his wishes to the best of my power, and take great pains to avoid everything which may have the effect of putting myself in a prominent position. However, I have invited half a dozen of the worst conditioned, most ignorant, and most destitute of our lads to come to a night-school in my study for the present; but I expect that the arrangement will be forbidden.

Harry, who was here the other day, took the

rebellious line, and advised me, upon the principle that every man's house is his castle, to resist all interference with my reception of whom I will in my private lodgings; but he is altogether wrong. I must endeavour to do my best for the people here; but where the Vicar puts his veto upon any plan adopted by me, I must submit, or resign my charge.

I have spoken of the blessings of the past year, but I have omitted one which has been like a gleam of sunlight to me. Whenever things have been uncomfortable, and I have felt lonely and depressed, this has been a source of rejoicing. Loving Harry as I do, the prospect of his making a happy marriage is indeed a source of the highest satisfaction. The notion first came into my mind that he had thoughts of forming an engagement of that kind on the day when Lord Kingsbury came over with him to call on me. A month or two afterwards, his visit to the castle was repeated, and then it was formally announced that he had been accepted by Lady Flora, the youngest of the Marquis's daughters. In consequence of the extreme youth of the bride, the marriage will not take place till after Christmas; but it has been my happiness to notice the effect which the connection has already produced on Harry. He says himself that he feels as if he had been

married these ten years; and he certainly is steadied down, and the thoughtless volatility which often made me anxious has left him, though he is as light-hearted and merry as ever. All I can hear of the lady leads me to think that he has made a wise choice. I suppose I am no great judge of beauty, but the only time I ever saw her, I was more struck with the innocent expression, and the goodness of her countenance, than with "the blue eyes with dark furniture" about which Harry duly raves.

Strange to say, I got in a scrape at the Vicarage about this marriage. Harry mentioned his engagement to me the day before the Soapers returned from Brighton. There was no secret about the matter. And my head and heart being full of it, I alluded to it on my first visit at the Vicarage. Mrs. Soaper treated the announcement with high disdain,—as mere gossip which had reached Roost, from the scullery or servants'-hall at Thorswoldestone. There were scores of such tales every year: not a gentleman, hardly, paid a visit to the Castle, under the age of thirty, but he was set down as a suitor to one of the Ladies Fazakerley. The taste for disseminating such stories was, she must say, a very vulgar one, and quite unwarrantable. Besides, the absurdity of the rumour was so great, that no one who really knew any-

thing of the family would credit it for a moment. Lady Flora was a mere child; still, she believed, in the school-room, drinking tea at five o'clock with the governess, and more likely to be thinking of a doll than a lover. Was it likely that any man would pay attentions to her while that superb Lady Adeliza remained disengaged? But in fact, one single circumstance was sufficient to stamp the falsehood of the rumour. Lady Adeliza, Mrs. Soaper was proud to say, was a most intimate friend of Martha, and Martha had never heard a word from her on the subject. "I should much like to know your authority, Mr. Dove, for this preposterous tale of an engagement between Lady Flora, and that young Harley."

"It is Mr. Harley himself, ma'am."

There was a dead silence. Mrs. Soaper gave a short cough, and grew very red. What Miss Soaper grew I know not, for her ringlets shaded her face, and her head was buried in her crochet-work; but suddenly she began a sort of giggle which expanded into a howl. And thereupon, Mrs. Soaper waving her hand at me indignantly, exclaimed, "See, sir, what you have done!" and then pointed to the door, through which, of course, I disappeared as speedily as possible. When I called later in the day to inquire, the Vicar informed me that his dear

child's sensibility was so extreme, her affections so deep, and her nerves so unstrung, that the bare apprehension of being overlooked by Lady Adeliza, "though a most improbable event," had been too much for her, and had thrown her into hysterics.

I could only apologize, and express my regrets that anything said by me should have produced such uncomfortable results. And I thought it my duty to repeat my inquiries the day following. Happening to be in a hurry, I confess I was rather sorry to be shown into the drawing-room, and still more sorry to find that its only inmate was Miss Soaper, for being shy myself, and not having noticed any great talent for conversation in the lady, I felt myself passing into that uncomfortable state of mind in which one begins to ask oneself, "What shall I say first?" and then "What shall I say next?" and so experiences the pleasure of pumping at a dry pump. I made my inquiries nervously, and was answered monosyllabically. I inquired after the Vicar and Mrs. Soaper, and the response was of the same description. I suggested that it was a cold day, but Miss Soaper neither acceded nor dissented. I added that I thought it seasonable, but Miss Soaper was too prudent to reveal her own opinion on the subject. I asked if there were any news,

and the answer was "No." I inquired whether the lady was fond of work, and she answered me "Yes." I would have admired the work if I could, but that, unfortunately being impossible, I intimated my opinion that it must be very laborious; to which Miss Martha replied by a sneeze. A terror seizing me lest this sternutatory conclusion might be a preliminary to another fit of hysterics, I immediately took my leave. Miss Soaper took her pocket-handkerchief, and blew her nose.

I am particular in noting all that passed, for the results were of a kind altogether unexpected.

On four, or perhaps five other occasions in the course of the next month, the same circumstance occurred. Now and then, having parochial business to transact with the Vicar, I called before noon, and after my interview with Miss Soaper had extended over some minutes, I was informed that the Vicar feeling more indisposed than usual had not finished his dressing or his breakfast. On the other occasions, going down to the house in the afternoon, I was informed after due search had been made that it was believed the Vicar had gone out fishing, or shooting. On each occasion Miss Soaper was bending over work, and on each occasion the conversation was as nearly as possible identical with that already recorded. A melancholy im-

pression crept over me that a young woman of, —say eight or nine and twenty, must have bound herself by a vow not to leave her seat till she had completed some fabulous number of babies' hoods, and anti-macassars ;

“ ————— sedet, æternumque sedebit
Infelix . . . ”

and that she was immolating health and spirits in crochetolatry. Her hands looked cold, and blue, and moist ; her face, so far as I could catch a glimpse of it through the pendent ringlets, pasty and puffy. I was quite sorry for her. It seemed as if her tongue was only employed in counting stitches, her thoughts solely occupied with thick-ribbed cotton, or Shetland wool. But as for making conversation it was impossible. I could as soon have walked up a wall. In twenty years of such interviews I should have made no approach to intimacy. Inexpressible, therefore, was my astonishment when, on my next visit to the Vicarage, I was shown into the study, and Mr. Soaper addressed me as follows : “ My dear sir, when a man has anything of importance to communicate I conceive that he best discharges his duty by saying what he has to say without circumlocution. Circumlocution, my dear sir, too frequently prevents the matter to be discussed from being

perfectly comprehended, and where a mutual understanding is to be obtained things should be made easy of comprehension. To that point therefore, I apply myself. I desire to speak with the greatest friendliness, but also with all plainness and simplicity. You have lately made several calls at this house?"

I assented, wondering what was coming next.

"From accidental circumstances, neither Mrs. Soaper nor myself have been in the way; in fact, for the last month my admirable wife has been on a visit of condolence to her widowed sister, Mrs. Meggott. My precious Lopy is the sun, as I may say, of our little world, and in her absence, both gathering clouds around I view, and days are dark, and friends are few: but let that pass. On these occasions, you have been shown in to Miss Soaper?"

"Yes, sir."

"It was the error of an ignorant or injudicious housemaid, for which, of course, you are not responsible: but I think it my duty to mention as a hint for your future guidance, that in the upper classes of society, in which I and mine are privileged to walk, young unmarried ladies do not receive young unmarried gentlemen without the presence of some third person, whom we call a chaperone. You see the impropriety of the course you have taken, and the

risk to which the fair fame of an innocent girl of tender years has been exposed."

I was so utterly astounded at the course the conversation was taking, that I had not a word to say : but this, perhaps, was as well, for I believe that if I had spoken on the impulse of the moment, I should have said that I should as soon have anticipated that a charge of impropriety would have been grounded on the fact of my being closeted with my grandmother, as with Miss Soaper ; that she was positively no more to me than the chair she sat on. But I am glad I did not say this, for it might have given pain.

"You are silent, my dear sir. Well, what is done cannot be undone : and my duty obliges me to speak of the future, rather than of the past. I understand that at these interviews with my daughter your manner has been extraordinarily constrained. You have betrayed great consciousness : you have made efforts to speak, to reveal something which was on your mind ; but you have abstained. Sir, I honour you for abstaining. You have not disturbed my daughter's peace."

"Really, Mr. Soaper"

"Excuse me, my good sir, allow me to finish in one painful sentence all I have to say, and to close the subject for ever. I am gratified at seeing my beloved Martha's excellencies ap-

preciated. I am flattered that a man of worth, and unquestioned moral character should aspire to a filial connection with me. But a parent must look far in all directions before he permits the happiness of his child to be compromised. I can lay my hand on my heart, and say I have no ambition. I do not covet an exalted alliance for Martha, though she is the sole daughter of my house and heart, and the prop of my dyspeptic, if not declining, years. I am no adorer of the great, nor worshipper at the shrine of Mammon. All I desire for her is a modest competence with the man of her heart: but, my good sir, an uncertain income of eighty pounds a year is not competence. The thing must be at an end. Heaven bless and prosper you! but you must set your heart on some other object than my poor little ewe lamb. Excuse my tears, they are those of a father. I can restrain myself no longer. I leave you, lest I should expose myself."

And without giving me the opportunity of saying one word in explanation, the Vicar bolted out of the room. It shows me how undisciplined I am, that I went home thoroughly provoked, and that I sat down and wrote an angry letter. However, I was not so foolish as to send it that night; and the next morning, Harry came over to see me. Not without hesitation, and under

a promise of secrecy, I told him what had occurred, and the shrieks of laughter he uttered so far infected me, that I began to see the affair in a ridiculous, rather than in a serious light ; and it ended by my sending such a despatch to the Vicarage as I suppose proved satisfactory, for two days afterwards, Mrs. Soaper sent me a pork pie. Harry said it was intended by way of compensation for my loss, but that in fact it was no compensation, for Miss Soaper was the more attractive-looking of the two. Which was rather ill-natured of him, (yet he never means to be ill-natured) though characteristic enough of his joking ways.

Of course I took especial good care on all future occasions to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Soaper : and though I hope I was not uncourteous, I certainly made no attempts to lead her into conversation : but indeed she seemed to have no desire for it, being wholly engrossed with her work. Being anxious to do all in my power to dispel the uncomfortable feeling which Mrs. Soaper had entertained towards me, I did my best to make myself agreeable to her. But here, again, I was met with a rebuff, for, at another interview in the study, the Vicar intimated his opinion that although he had not a shade of jealousy in his nature, he was not sure that it would be reckoned quite *comme il faut*

for the Curate to laugh and talk on familiar terms with the Vicar's wife.

So there was an end of my efforts to be upon comfortable terms with the family at the Vicarage; and a circumstance soon afterwards occurred which made my position the reverse of comfortable, and caused me to feel that whether I paid my respects there, or stayed away, my conduct was equally disapproved. Whatever I did or omitted seemed to be looked upon with jaundiced eyes.

And thus it fell out. I am not sure whether I mentioned in my journal that the attendance of the labouring classes at Roost church has increased during the past year, and that our congregations are much better. I suppose it may have been in consequence of what the Bishop may have said about the church after he had made me show it to him; that before the Vicar's return home the Marquis of Kingsbury came over to the morning service two or three times. I had, of course, noticed his presence, and I had seen him in the church one afternoon when I was catechising the school-children before service; but beyond a bow of recognition, no intercourse had passed between us. I was aware that the Bishop thought the whole fabric in a state of deplorable dilapidation, and that the orders of the Archdeacon as to the

needful repairs had been evaded. My suspicions had led me to suppose that Mr. Tite had opposed himself to the proper restoration of the church, and that the Vicar, not caring to differ from the great man's great man, and unwilling to be represented to the Marquis as eager to involve the parish in expenses, had thrown all the obstacles in his power in the way of any movement in what I must needs call the right direction. Whether this had really been the case, I cannot tell, but many trifling things that came to my knowledge seemed to confirm the notion I had taken up; and I was not at all surprised that when the Marquis had begun to look into matters at Roost with his own eyes, he should feel that the state of the church called for immediate attention, and this the more, if the Bishop, who was on terms of intimacy with him, had given expression to his own opinion on the subject.

Soon after the Vicar's return, the good old Rector of Sunnymede was taken seriously ill one Saturday night, too late to make any arrangements for the next day, and the consequence was, that the church at Sunnymede being closed for that Sunday, Lord Kingsbury and his family came to church at Roost. Ordinarily, the Vicar preached once on each alternate Sunday. It was his turn to preach on

this occasion ; but he sent me a message the night before to say that it would not be convenient to him to preach the next day, and that I must prepare a sermon. Which I did, and preached it ; the Vicar saying the prayers.

We had hardly got into the vestry, before we were followed by Mrs. Soaper. " My dear Mr. Soaper, the Marquis ! Didn't you notice the Marquis, and the Marchioness, and Lady Adeliza, and Lady Louisa, and Lady Flora, and a most elegant man with moustaches ? "

" Yes, Lopy, I bowed to them from the reading-desk : but they took no particular notice. "

" But why in the world, my love, don't you get that nasty old surplice off, and follow them down the aisle ? If you'll make haste, you'll be in time to hand them into the carriage. Martha is gone to Lady Adeliza. She was so overjoyed, poor darling, that she quite skipped out of the pew to greet them. Make haste, my dear, make haste ! Think how much may depend upon your keeping yourself full in view at the present moment. Out of sight, out of mind. If any thing should happen to old Sydney. . . . "

" Hush-sh-sh-sh ! " murmured the Vicar. " Whatever is, is right. I have no ambition. I wait for no dead men's shoes. "

" Goodness gracious ! never mind that now. Only do make haste ! Dear, dear, never was

anything so unfortunate as that you didn't preach! If we had but known! And," I could not help hearing the words after they had passed through the vestry door, "that man's flowery sermon will be the thing they will go home and talk about. It is too vexatious! Depend upon it he is setting up for a popular preacher."

Well, really, my conscience acquitted me of that; for I am not aware of ever having any desire connected with my preaching beyond that of being able to speak in such a way as to be listened to and understood by the very ignorant labourers at Roost. However, one may always get good from hearing unjust charges brought against us. We may learn to be more watchful; and seeing ourselves as others see us may check unsuspected tendencies towards evil.

The Vicar returned to the vestry for his walking-stick in an uncomfortable state of mind, and Mrs. Soaper in a still worse. They had reached the west door only in time to hear a rattling sound among the loose gravel, and to see a barouche full of grandees drive off at grandee pace. Mrs. Soaper's vexation vented itself in complaints of the slowness of her husband's movements; Mr. Soaper was very angry with the clerk for leaving a hassock at the foot of the chancel steps: thereby causing the in-

cumbent of Roost to stumble, and break his shin over a form. Every body left the Vestry that morning in a very indifferent humour. I was vexed at being supposed to be aiming at popularity; the clerk was vexed with the hassock, and, to all appearances, the Soapers were vexed with the Curate, with the Clerk, with the hassock, with Lord Kingsbury's coachman, and four horses, with each other, and with themselves. Poor Miss Martha must have had an uncomfortable walk home.

But worse followed. Mr. Sydney's illness continuing, the Vicar wrote to him to offer to serve Sunnymede church on the following Sunday. The offer was accepted, and the Vicar, nothing doubting, I suppose, that the family at Thorswoldestone would revert to their usual habits, and go to Sunnymede, drove off thither with his wife and daughter.

But from some cause which I have never heard explained, the Marquis appeared at Roost with the same party as on the preceding Sunday. I was, of course, in no way accountable for this. I do not remember that I had ever thought on the subject at all; but if I did, I certainly should have expected that they would have preferred Sunnymede to Roost. However, when the Vicar returned, he expressed great irritation, and seemed to hint that it was my fault.

I said nothing to defend myself, for I did not think that defence was needed, and supposed that when the momentary fit of vexation was over, he would feel the absurdity of supposing that I was in any way connected with what had occurred : but he still reverted to the matter, after two or three days' interval, as if I had injured him. I could only profess my entire ignorance of the arrangements at the castle, and my readiness to preach or not to preach, to stay at Roost, or go to Sunnymede, on the following Sunday, (for Mr. Sydney, though recovering, was still unfit for duty,) as he would like best.

Accordingly, on Saturday afternoon, I received a note from the Vicar, desiring me to go to Sunnymede in his place the next morning. I confess I was rather vexed that he did not offer me his horse ; for two full services, and a walk of eight miles, was more than I felt equal to, having been rather knocked up of late. However, the fresh morning air invigorated me, and I enjoyed the change, and especially the contrast to all that I was in the habit of seeing at Roost. But I felt that I should be in a terrible scrape on my return ; for when I entered the reading-desk, there, in the open sittings full in front of me, was the whole party from Thorswoldestone, and Harry Harley among them.

When the service was over, Harry came to

the vestry on an embassy, to bid me to luncheon at the castle : but this I sturdily declined. I would remain in the vestry till the afternoon, for I should really be glad of the rest.

"You're quite wrong, old fellow. The Screw and the Screwess wouldn't have refused."

"O," answered I, "that is quite a different case."

"Quite," said Harry. "Well, old Soaper has been sold again."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that he made sure he would catch us at Roost this time : but we knew better than to fall into the trap."

"You don't mean to tell me, Harry, that what has occurred with respect to the Vicar for these two Sundays has not been the result of accident?"

"Yes, but I do, old fellow."

"Well, then, all I have to say on the subject is, that it is exceedingly wrong ; and that if I had had the faintest suspicion of what was going on, nothing should have induced me to come here."

"I'll tell you what, Dove, if you were in the Marquis's place, you would have done just as the Marquis has. You are such a kind-hearted, unsuspecting, charitable, old goose, that you have not found out your Vicar's tricks, as we have : but you'll find him out by and by."

"I hope not," said I.

By the time that we were leaving church in the afternoon the day had completely changed. It was not only raw and gusty, but there were frequent showers of sleet, and the thick, murky sky-line gave promise of some speedy continuous downfall of rain or snow. There was every prospect of a cold, wet evening. My great coat was not calculated to stand much severity of weather, and I had been inconsiderate enough to leave home without an umbrella. While the clerk was gone to the Rectory to borrow one, Harry once more re-entered the vestry. Such a drenching shower was falling, that the Thorswoldestone party were waiting in the church till it was over. The Marquis had sent Harry to say that there was a vacant seat in one of the carriages, and that he hoped I would dine and sleep at the Castle. "So don't be obstinate, old fellow," said Harry, "but come."

Well I hope it was not obstinacy : but after what had passed in the morning, and with the knowledge I now had that the Vicar's scheme to bring himself into notice had been frustrated, and that I had been the unintentional means of disappointing him, I felt that I should only intensify his uncomfortable feelings towards me, if I accepted the invitation. And I therefore declined, vexing Harry, I fear not a little, and

tempting him to say things which, poor fellow, he hastened to unsay as soon as he saw how much he was paining me.

When the shower was over, I set off on my walk homewards ; but before I had got a quarter of the way the rain set in, and so heavily, that in half an hour I was wet to the skin, while the bitter cold east wind almost froze my clothes to me as I walked. It was dark before I got home to my chilly, smoky room, completely knocked up ; and my appearance was so deplorable, that Mrs. Ferrall, though by no means the softest of her sex, grew pitiful, ordered me off to bed at once, warmed it, and then insisted on my drinking off a basin of hot gruel, "with a sup of ale in it."

"The sup of ale" finished me. I soon became as hot as I had been cold. I no longer shivered, or imagined that the rain was trickling down between my back and my shirt ; I grew hot, thirsty, and restless ; fell asleep for half an hour and dreamed that I was being chased by Mrs. Soaper and the lads who could get no night-school, through a duck pond ; and that just as I was emerging from the water, Miss Martha had thrown her work-box at me, which catching me across the ribs hurt me exceedingly. Then I awoke, and found the pain in the side by no means unreal ; and that I was

more hot, more thirsty, and more restless than ever. So I passed a miserable night, and by morning a pretty sharp pain extending towards my shoulder-blades, with a spasm of some sort, like a severe stitch, whenever I drew my breath, gave me a pretty clear intimation of an attack of pleurisy.

Alas ! in my calculations as to the amount of assistance which I should be able to render my poor mother, I had made no deduction on the score of illness, and the possible length of a doctor's bill. The thought, therefore, of applying for medical aid was very distressing, but I knew I was rapidly getting worse, and I began to feel as if I should soon be light-headed. It would never do to have my mother alarmed with an account of my serious illness : my life and health were important to her, if to no one else : it would be better to sink five or even ten pounds in getting well, than run the risk of adding to her distresses. So I sent for our Roost doctor.

Meanwhile, comes a message from the Vicarage,—“ Mr. Soaper's compliments, and he desired to see Mr. Dove at twelve o'clock.” I could only send a verbal message that I was in bed, and too ill to leave it, but that I hoped to be able to wait on the Vicar the next day. The next day ! little did I know of pleurisy, or an-

ticipate the discipline of bleeding and blisters to which I was destined to be exposed.

I afterwards found that my friend the doctor had given himself the trouble to go down to the Vicarage and report my uncomfortable condition, suggesting that some matters should be attended to in the way of diet, &c., and that a nurse should be found. Nothing, indeed, resulted from his recommendations, but I mention the circumstance here to show what a kind-hearted man this Mr. Stokes is (I judged that he was so from his conduct to those poor Ashes long before I knew him) and to remind myself of my obligations to him. Indeed, I owe much more than this to him, for, learning from me how the illness had been brought on, that I *might* have gone to the Castle, and did not, and that Harry Harley was my intimate friend, he drove over to Thorswoldestone,—(he was the Marquis's medical attendant)—saw Harry, and advised with him as to what should be done for me, for it appeared that he thought my lodgings unfavourable to the promotion of recovery. But, indeed, there was no lack of kindness. As soon as it was known I was ill, several of the poor women in the village volunteered the office of nurse; and foremost among them widow Ashe, (less rough and wild-looking now than she was a year ago, and, I hope and believe, improved

in many ways,) was so importunate in her offers, that I was obliged to see her myself, and satisfy her that if she could serve me I would send for her. But the thing which affected me most (for I could understand the feeling of obligation which brought this poor widow to offer her services) was the manner in which the poor neglected lads whom I was endeavouring to reclaim and instruct, haunted the school-house yard, and sent their dutiful inquiries, or brought a fresh egg or two, or some winter apples, or some such trifle, in the hope that the parson might take a liking to them, and that they would do him good. There is no kindness like the kindness of the poor! none so tender, so devoted, so self-denying. Nothing which to those who receive it teaches such a lesson with respect to their own short-comings :

“I’ve heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning,
Alas, the gratitude of men
Has oftener left me mourning !”

One great blessing in the course of my illness was that I never was in such a reduced condition as to make it impossible for me to write my daily letter to my mother, and so she escaped all needless alarm about me. When I got better my doctor insisted on my leaving Roost for two or three weeks. My earnest wish, of course,

was to go and see her ; but on reflection I felt that the sight of me in my present condition would, in all probability, only create an anxiety from which she was at present free, and therefore I accepted Harry's offer to go and spend a fortnight with him and the General at Harleyford. I should be among old friends, and any trouble I gave would, I was satisfied, be borne cheerfully.

So I wrote a note to the Vicar, expressing my wish to be allowed a few weeks' leave of absence from my post.

He answered my application in person. I was seated by the fire, wrapped up in a blanket, for the day was cold, and the open door made the room draughty, when he was ushered in.

"This is very kind of you, sir," said I. "You know what a gratification it is to an invalid to receive a visit from a friend."

"Yes, my good sir, the man who will not rouse himself to make an exertion when humanity demands it of him, is unworthy to be classed among those, who strive, as I hope I ever shall, to be counted among the benefactors of their race. And, in fact, it was an exertion, a great one. Whether confinement to the house during the late severe weather has thrown the digestive organs out of gear I really know not, but I have been unusually dyspeptic of late. It is

my great misfortune that even though compelled to forego my wonted exercise, I cannot venture to abate either the quality or the quantity of my food. A highly nutritive and generous diet is essential to me. Without it, I sink, I flag, I grow depressed. And yet when deprived of my medium of healthful air and muscular exertion, the functions get disordered ; I suffer from dizziness and other uncomfortable sensations of repletion and congestion ; the tongue becomes loaded : look at it, my good sir, you see it is quite a shocking tongue : bile gets into the system, there is a tinge of yellow in one's complexion ; a taste there is in one's mouth, which I can only describe as mousy ; in short, one gets quite out of condition. I have been suffering greatly of late ; and still suffer. Stokes lays the fault on confinement to the house, and he always quarrels with a *paté de foie gras* which my old friend Bob Waddilove" (I suspect that this must be the "Bob," to whom the Vicar was writing on that unlucky day when he mingled satin paper and straw together,) "always sends me at this time of year ; and which comes in as a nice stimulant to a flagging appetite at luncheon : but to tell you the truth, I am convinced that although want of muscular exertion may have contributed to my indisposition, it is mainly attributable to

the very heavy amount of Church work which has fallen upon me through your going and catching cold. It is hardly credible that in a village of this size such a call for ministerial functions should have been made in a fortnight. It is really as if the people had done it out of spite, and in order to make themselves as troublesome as possible. During those cold days not less than four wretched creatures died at the workhouse, and of course I had to bury them, bareheaded, and shivering from head to foot. And one of them was an infant not two days old! Really the folly, and absurdity of being obliged to read that long burial office over a nasty little brat, not eighteen inches long, and that nobody cares for! It is intolerable. And another infant went into convulsions, and I had to baptize it. And there was a wedding last Thursday, besides a churching on Sunday in addition to the Sunday services. What is to become of me under such circumstances I know not. I am exhausted, shattered, worn to fiddle-strings! My health is not equal to the strain upon it. And now that Mr. Stokes, (who between ourselves always exaggerates ailments, and sees the dark side of a case)—now that even he pronounces you convalescent, you apply to me to be allowed to go a pleasuring to Harleyford Hall. You must

excuse me, my good sir, for saying that you are most inconsiderate. Because I have given an inch, there is no reason why you should demand an ell. You really should have some little thought for others. Selfishness is a vice which grows with frightful rapidity wherever it is encouraged."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Soaper," said I in reply, "to hear of your ailments, and still more sorry that you should look at my application as having been made without due consideration, but the fact is that I am utterly unfit, as I am, to undertake any portion of the parish work, and my object in going to Harleyford is to avail myself of change of air, so that my health may be restored as speedily as possible. Believe me I am as anxious to return to my post, as you can be to have me there."

"O for that matter," said the Vicar, exchanging his usually smooth manner for one of considerable roughness, "I must confess that I feel little anxiety on the subject. When I engaged you, I understood you were a healthy man. I should never have dreamed of nominating an inefficient invalid to be Curate of Roost. The state of my own health is notorious. If I have a Curate he must be one who can undertake the whole duty of the parish through the year, and be content to labour at

his post, without trying to get a footing in all the great houses of the neighbourhood. If my Curate cannot content himself with these terms, the sooner he resigns the better. I have had several superior men, sir, as my curates, and men with whom I have been altogether satisfied, and who have never endeavoured to set up a separate interest in the parish on their own account, at my expense. But not one of them have used me as you have. But I see you are growing excited, sir; I make it a rule never to quarrel with any one. I live in the bonds of peace with all, and therefore I must wish you good morning. Of course I cannot refuse your application. I cannot offend General Harley; but it is very inconsiderate, very merciless; and to have to pay a Curate eighty pounds a year,—a twelvemonth's salary, and to receive but ten months and a fortnight of service in return is, in my opinion anything but just, or equitable. And in my opinion the man who seeks to eat bread which he has not earned must have a covetous mind, and a grasping hand. Mr. Dove, I wish you good morning!"

This was an unpleasant ebullition enough, especially as it fell upon me when I was a good deal weakened with illness. I felt that it ought to make me indignant, but it did make me shed tears; but then so did the noise produced

by Mrs. Ferrall's girl in upsetting a full coal-scuttle down the stairs. And a little reflection showed me that this was not the sort of thing that I ought to care about. It was best to forget it at once. Probably Mr. Soaper had been vexed at finding that the Thorswoldestone party had attended Sunnymede Church on the day when he made sure that they would come over to Roost; probably he had persuaded himself that, somehow or other, it was through my fault he had been disappointed, and so bottling up his wrath ever since, he had uncorked it on the first occasion of our meeting. We are all of us liable to these little bursts of infirmity, and poor Mr. Soaper is perhaps a little too self-indulgent, and so unable to take patiently such matters as fall out differently from his expectations. And I have always heard that such sensations as he described himself as having experienced lately make a man irritable, and hypochondriacal. I hope he will forget what has taken place, as I am sure I shall; but if he does not he will probably be ashamed, and so give me a hearty shake of the hand, when next we meet. But even suppose him in earnest, my duty is clear, to keep my own temper, and not put myself in the wrong:

“ Ah! if our souls but poise and swing
Like the compass in its brazen ring,

Ever level and ever true,
To the toil and the task we have to do,
We shall sail securely, and safely reach
The Fortunate isles, on whose shining beach
The sights we see, and the sounds we hear,
Will be those of joy and not of fear."

I spent a fortnight at Harleyford. Purer air, and better food than I had had of late did wonders for me, and I thoroughly enjoyed the change. The General was so happy in his son's prospects, and in being able to open upon the subject to one whom he well knew appreciated Harry's merits, that he seemed to come out in a new character. I was no longer, as of yore, the tutor who was to be treated with courtesy and consideration, but who was the tutor still; rather I was welcomed as an old friend who knew the ways of the house, and had an interest in everything connected with it, and made to feel thoroughly at home. As for Harry, he devoted himself to me with as much care as if there was no such place as Thorswoldestone Castle in the world, and as if his thoughts had no other object besides myself to absorb them. "How happily the days of Thalaba went by!" But holydays come to an end, and I hope that I had other thoughts in my mind than a schoolboy repugnance to go back to my smoky lodgings, and Mrs. Ferrall's untempting fare. I had good reason to hope that I was

being of use at Roost, gaining an influence over many minds, and that with patience and temper I should get over the difficulties which of late had thwarted and disappointed me. The morning of my return the General called me aside, and told me that he had a great favour to ask of me. He said that it was mainly owing to my care and pains that Harry was what he is,—the joy and pride of his heart. He said that he had meant to mark his sense of his obligations to me by begging my acceptance of some addition to my library, and that this offering was to have been made on the wedding-day; but that upon reflection, he thought that such a serious illness might have involved me in considerable expenses, and that it was absolutely necessary that I should live well; then blushing and hesitating in a way which I should have supposed impossible in such a stately man of the world, he said he hoped that I would not be offended at hearing that Stubbs had received orders to send me some of that old port which he was persuaded had done me more good than anything else during the last fortnight, and that I would accept the intended keepsake in another form. It was a bank note for one hundred pounds!

So my heart was light indeed as I returned to Roost. I should be able to pay my doctor's

bill without difficulty, and to make a large addition to my mother's comforts.

The next morning I proceeded to the Vicarage to report myself at head-quarters. The unpleasantness of my last interview with the Vicar had really passed out of my mind during those pleasant days at Harleyford. Of course I had never mentioned the subject to Harry, and I believe should not have thought of the matter again, if I had not contrasted the condition in which I was when I left my lodgings with that in which I returned to them: but it never occurred to me that the Vicar would not have forgotten the matter too.

Great was my astonishment therefore, when on being ushered into the library, and proceeding to offer my hand, the Vicar held his own behind him as he stood by the fire, and only said by way of greeting, "Your servant, Mr. Dove." Then addressing himself to the maid who had shown me in, he said, "Tell your mistress that Mr. Dove is here."

As Mr. Soaper made no inquiries after my health, I ventured to express the hope that he was better than on the occasion when I had last seen him.

"On the contrary, sir, I am infinitely worse. I had hoped, Mr. Dove, that you would have given due consideration to the remarks which, in

justice to myself, I felt beholden to make to you, and that you would have taken the only manly and straightforward course that was left to you."

"The only manly and straightforward course that was left to you, Mr. Dove," said Mrs. Soaper, who having entered the room, and taken her position in an arm-chair, re-echoed her husband's words, and tabbered with her fingers on the table, expectant of my reply.

"I am extremely sorry," I answered, "that there should be any misunderstanding, or that you have been expecting any communication from me which I have not sent; but I must candidly confess that I thought you spoke hastily, under temporary irritation. . . ."

"Mr. Dove, the Vicar is never irritated, how great soever may be the temptations to irritation," observed Mrs. Soaper.

"Spoke hastily!" exclaimed the Vicar, "I never speak hastily."

"I am sorry to hear you say so," I replied, "for I must needs say that your words seemed very harsh and unjust."

"I said just what I thought, Mr. Dove, and what I considered the truth. . . ."

"And what is the truth," interposed the lady.

"That it was gross selfishness on your part to leave Roost for your own pleasure, while I was in such delicate health; that it was little,

if at all short of a gross imposition on your part to undertake a curacy, and then to repudiate your duties ; and, worse than all, to claim a salary which you have not earned. The fact is, Mr. Dove, that I have been altogether deceived, and disappointed in you. You had hardly been here a week before you compromised yourself shamefully with those wicked Ashes."

"Shamefully," cried Mrs. Soaper, waving a handscreen at me.

"You made the Marquis quarrel with our poor friend Mr. Tite . . ."

"And thereby broke Mr. Tite's heart," ejaculated Mrs. Soaper.

"You have been guilty of all sorts of mean, underhand tricks in order to worm yourself into favour at the Castle."

"Though, for that matter, I have the satisfaction of knowing that you have entirely failed, and that you are looked upon as you deserve to be," added the lady.

"You have endeavoured to draw the affections of my parishioners from me to yourself. You have preached claptrap to itching ears, so as to exalt yourself at my expense. You have now, I have no doubt, instigated the scum and riffraff of Roost to insult me . . ."

"Sending a score of ill-mannered louts to beard the Vicar in his own parish ; telling him,

forsooth, that *they* would hire a room for a night-school, if he would permit you to instruct them."

"It is the first I have heard of it, I solemnly assure you," said I; for in the torrent of words with which I had been attacked, I could find no opportunity to edge in a word of exculpation.

"Perhaps so, Mr. Dove; but these are the natural results of your own system,—of the system which you have been working ever since you set foot in the village: the object of that system being to alienate the affections of my parishioners from me . . ."

"Their beloved pastor," cried Mrs. Soaper. "O, Mr. Dove! for you to call yourself a gentleman, or a Christian, and to practise such arts, I blush for you!"

"Pardon me, my dear Lopy, I wished you to be a witness to this conversation, in order that it may not be misrepresented; but it is high time to bring it to a conclusion. Mr. Dove, where there is uncongeniality of disposition, there is a bar to confidential communication. It is as clear as the sun in the sky that you and I shall never suit each other, and therefore the only thing for you to do, if you have any of the feelings of a gentleman . . ."

"If you have the smallest share of the feelings of a gentleman," cried the echo.

"You will resign your curacy before you leave this roof, and vacate your lodgings immediately."

It was now my turn to speak, and this is what I said.

"There is not one of the charges, Mr. Soaper, which you have brought against me that is true. They are charges of so grave a nature, that if you can substantiate them, I am not only unfit for my position in this, but in any other parish. Were I to resign the Curacy, I should admit what I wholly deny. You are not disposed to accept my denial. There is therefore but one course to be adopted. I refuse to resign the Curacy till you have laid the matter before the Bishop, and I am either acquitted or condemned."

I imagine, by his manner, that Mr. Soaper was unprepared for my answer. He evidently hesitated what to say next. But his wife came to the rescue.

"Take him at his word, Mr. Soaper, and lay the case before the Bishop. You must not submit to be trampled on in this way."

Four days afterwards I got a note from the Bishop saying that he had received a communication from Mr. Soaper which had determined him to require my attendance, and that of Mr. Soaper, at the Palace at two o'clock in the afternoon, on the next day but one.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE.

"Alas the day! what shall I do with my doublet and hose?"

As you like it.

Roost is five miles from the Botheram Road Station, and Botheram Road is some thirty miles from Chadsminster,—the famous three-mile tunnel through the escarpment of the chalk, lying at a short distance south of Botheram.

As the eleven o'clock train was the only one in the course of the morning which would carry me to the Cathedral Close in time for the Bishop's appointment, I took care to make an early start, first, because I had five miles to walk, and secondly, because I always find it better to have some minutes to spare at Botherham. Nothing bewilders me like a station which is a central point of communication between several lines; the struggle of the passengers changing their carriages, and growling over missing luggage; the pressure to get tickets

before that horrible bell begins to ring; the shouts of porters, and the puffing and screeching of the engines; the apprehension of getting upon a wrong line; or (being upon the right line) of going the wrong way,—all these things dispose me to lose my presence of mind, if I am at all late or hurried; and therefore, Botheram Road being a station where three lines intersect each other, I like to be there a full quarter of an hour before there is any actual necessity for my presence.

I had been some minutes on the platform, and having secured my ticket, was watching the arrivals, when the Vicar's sleek ponies arrived in sight. But to my surprise there was no Vicar in the carriage,—only Mrs. Soaper.

I had no quarrel with either of them. They had chosen to quarrel with me, but that was their affair, not mine; and I had not the smallest inclination to put myself in the wrong by any want of courtesy. So I hastened forward to hand Mrs. Soaper out of the carriage, and to offer my services in getting her ticket.

I was too late to perform the first office, for the good lady had already alighted, and was scolding her servant, so I advanced no further, and I am afraid, rather amused myself by studying her angry gesticulation. A commanding-looking body is the Vicar's wife;

rather over than under the average height, a little too masculine in her walk, and big-boned ; but when well-dressed, (which to say truth she is not apt to be,) she is just the sort of person to whom folks yield instinctively, without making any inquiry as to the pretensions assumed, and which seldom bear sifting. Mrs. Soaper had reigned so long at Roost, that it was not unnatural that she should be disposed to queen it everywhere else. Whether she possesses the nerve which puts down rebellion I confess I rather doubt ; but where her sway is undisputed, and there is no particular call for self-reliance and self-possession, she seems to have a talent (as indisputably she has a strong taste) for command. There she stood, rating the coachman, in her black velvet Sunday bonnet, and her ample black velvet jacket, and her puce-coloured silk skirt, till the poor man looked as if he would have been rather glad than not if the earth would have opened and swallowed him. What the expression of her face might have been I know not, for the fluttering of her black lace veil and cherry-coloured ribbons in the fresh morning breeze prevented me from getting a sight of it ; but certainly when, a minute or two afterwards, it was directed at myself, it was anything rather than benign.

I did not venture to offer her my hand, for her "Good morning, Mr. Dove," froze me. "Is the Vicar here?" I inquired.

"I am, Mr. Dove."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Soaper; but I meant to say, that if he was not here, I should be very happy to render you any assistance."

"If you are ignorant, Mr. Dove, of the cause of the Vicar's absence, I can only say that I believe that you are the only one of his parishioners that is in that predicament."

"I assure you I have heard nothing. I am very sorry . . ."

"Sorry, Mr. Dove!"

"Yes, ma'am, very heartily sorry, if anything is amiss."

"You really must excuse me, Mr. Dove," answered the lady with a little laugh, "but I cannot quite credit that. Knowing as you have done for months the state of my poor husband's health, you must have been perfectly aware that such a scene as you compelled him to go through with you could not have been otherwise than highly prejudicial to him. The agitation you caused has, of course, brought on one of the severest forms of dyspeptic derangement with which he has been visited. For the last twelve hours he has been wholly confined to his bed."

"I very much regret it."

"I don't doubt, Mr. Dove, but what you will have cause to do so before this day is over. If anything was wanting to fill up the measure of the treatment we have received at your hands, it would be found in the illness which you have produced in my dear husband. He is unable to lay his case before the Bishop; but I, his anxious wife, who have been cognizant of everything from the first, shall go in his place. I shall lay the whole matter before the Bishop, together with this last aggravation, and if justice is to be had anywhere, I will never rest till Mr. Soaper is delivered from the annoyances which his connexion with you has entailed upon him!"

Up to this moment, I confess that my impression had been that I was myself the ill-used person; and even now,—Heaven forgive me! the thought floated through my brain that it was the consciousness of this fact that had kept the Vicar in bed; that he felt he was safest at Roost; that his heart had failed him; that he was shirking the Bishop, whom he knew for a man that would hear both sides, and sift evidence carefully before he came to a decision. I own I had thought occasionally that Mr. Soaper had a good deal of the bully in him, and that now the cowardice which is always inherent in a bully's character was coming out.

I hope I was not very uncharitable, but the thought 'would come into my mind in spite of me.

And then came another thought, which was, that imagining that his wife would play his cards better for him than he could play them himself, he had sent her to fight his battle, and trusted to her woman's wit to work on the Bishop's feelings, and induce him to withdraw my licence, and dismiss me from Roost. In short, as I looked on Mrs. Soaper, I felt that she was now deputed to effect my ejection, and that perchance it would be said of me, as of Antigonus in "The Winter's Tale," that I was "*unroosted* by Dame Partlet here."

However, my suspicions, which, whether uncharitable or not, were best disallowed and put aside, were interrupted by the sound of the coming train, and turning on my heel I once more made my way to the platform. But I had hardly set foot on it when I felt that I was being very unkind, and that let this poor lady have what feelings she might towards me, I ought not to come short in showing, at any rate, my willingness to serve her. Two trains from opposite directions were steaming into the station; there was not a minute to lose, and Mrs. Soaper had not got her ticket. Already the carriages were stopping; there was the

rattling of doors, and the outpouring of passengers, and the shifting of luggage, and the bewildering shouts which directed to the different lines. I turned back, and made my way through the crowd to Mrs. Soaper.

"Do allow me, ma'am, to get your ticket for you."

"Allow you, sir? I shall do nothing of the kind. You'd send me down a wrong line, as soon as not. I think I see myself allowing you to get me a ticket for Chadsminster! No, sir, I shan't allow you!"

The words were spoken so loudly and so indignantly, that more than one passenger and porter turned round to look at the speaker. Among them, was a man with a profusion of black beard and moustache, enveloped in a long blue military cloak, and wearing a blue foraging cap with band of gold lace round it. I had seen him hurry out of a first-class carriage a moment before, and had noticed that he placed himself close beside Mrs. Soaper as if he knew her.

"Chadsminster, did you say, ma'am?" he exclaimed in a very soft and courteous tone, "I am going down that line. Allow me to get your ticket (first-class, I conclude) when I get my own. Never mind the money, ma'am! I will be back in a moment."

And almost before Mrs. Soaper had concluded her thanks to him for his attention, and accepted his offer, he was back again with the tickets in his hand.

"Yes, ma'am, five and sixpence: but we can settle that when we are in the carriage: this way, ma'am: allow me to escort you. All those carriages seem occupied: you dislike a crowded carriage? so do I. Ah! four nasty children in that. Here's one, madam, which I think will suit you: not too near the engine. You like to be towards the centre of the train, I dare say, in case of accidents. I always get in the centre of the train. Allow me, ma'am; permit me to hold your railway wrapper, and the umbrella, and . . ."

"O thank you a thousand times, sir, I can carry the bag."

"Nay, ma'am, permit me! Thank you. Charming bag," said the gentleman, looking at what I thought a frightful pattern in red and green cross-stitch, "and so light." The gentleman seemed to weigh it quite scientifically.

"It only contains papers," said Mrs. Soaper innocently. "I am merely going into Chads-minster for the morning."

"O indeed! you had better get in, ma'am." Mrs. Soaper ascended the steps, and seated herself. The gentleman followed her. "No one

else to come in?" asked the porter. "I am not certain, but I rather think not," said the gentleman.

Slam went the door; in went the key: the whistle sounded: and as I found my place in a crowded second-class vehicle, the train moved on.

A dash along the Slushyford Flats; some rapid snakelike windings under the heathery slopes of the Breezydown Hills; cautious steering through the dark, dank, dripping, three-mile tunnel: then, with helter-skelter speed through woods and fields down the gentle descent, till the great heavy Norman towers of Chadsminster Cathedral stand revealed in the centre of the plain; and then, in a few minutes more, under the grimy, mouldering walls of the old city, we reach the pert, dapper, station, all stucco, glass, and galvanized iron, holding up its head as saucily, as if it believed that the sole object of its existence was to snigger at, and

"flout those ruins grey."

I was sitting close by the door of the carriage with my ticket in my hand, when I noticed two policemen, a sergeant and common constable on the platform. The sergeant made a signal to some one whom I could not see: but the result was, that a railway official, with a man—appa-

rently not connected with the railway, speedily presented themselves at each carriage and cried out "Show your tickets, if you please," a ceremony which I had never before noticed at Chadsminster. Then a porter opened the doors of the second and third-class carriages, but those of the first-class still remained closed, and the porter only answered "Coming, sir," to an impatient youth who was anxious to be liberated, but never moved an inch, and looked to the guard and the police for his instructions. Something was evidently wrong. The temptation was too strong to be resisted, and I listened as I passed the conclave. The first words I caught were,—“telegraph,”—“no chance against that.” “All right.” “He’s nabbed, safe enough at last. Very near missed him, though : did miss him on Tuesday.”

“Which carriage, Smellfox?” asked the guard of the gentleman in plain clothes.

“Number two hundred and fifty-two,” was the answer.

“Are you ready, Sergeant Skeigh?” asked the guard.

“Ay, ay. Stay, though ; is there anybody with him?”

“Yes, a lady.”

“Do you know who she is?”

“O yes, I know her well enough. Steady

old gal, as often comes a shopping into this here town. Bless your heart! I know her as well as I know you; we always take her up at Botheram Road. She's the parson's wife up at Roost."

"Let her out then: perhaps he'll show fight, and then a woman in such close quarters as that would be the deuce and all. What's her name?"

"Soaper."

"Now then, get her out, guard. We'll take care that he doesn't bolt."

"Any lady of the name of Soaper in this carriage?" asked the guard, cautiously opening the door.

I heard no answer, but an affirmative must have been given, for immediately the guard cried out, "All right, ma'am; there's some ladies in a yellow carriage waiting for you outside."

I concluded that the news was very acceptable, for instantly the well-known black bonnet, and cherry-coloured ribbons, floating veil, velvet jacket, and puce silk gown made their appearance, and the wearer leaving the carriage, hurried down the platform, as if in search of her friends.

That no notice was taken of me, after what had occurred at the Botheram Road Station, I was not surprised; but it occurred to me,

just as she left the platform, that she must have left her railway wrapper, bag, and umbrella in the carriage, for she certainly had none of them in her hand. It seemed only kind to apprise her of the circumstance, before the train started again, so I hurried through the door leading to the town. What was my astonishment at beholding her running along the road with gigantic strides, and at such a "splitting pace," that she actually knocked over an old man who happened to get in her way, and, instead of stopping to pick him up, dashed down one of the back streets of the town, and so was out of sight in an instant.

"Well," thought I to myself, "if she is determined to have the first word with the Bishop she has gained her point, for even if we had stood side by side, and had started fair, she would have beat me hollow in no time. I must trust to the justice of my cause rather than to the fleetness of my feet. She is the most extraordinary woman, I ever came across. No reason that, however, why I should not do my best to get hold of her property which, in her haste, she has left behind her."

So I returned to the platform, where I was destined to see a still stranger sight. •

"Now then, Mr. Larkin, are you coming out of that quietly or no? You know me well

enough : this is not the first time that I have wanted you. 'Tis no manner of use your trying to hide your face in that way. If Smellfox didn't know you by this time as well as he knows his own brother, do you think he'd be fit to be a Detective?"

"O dear! O dear! O dear!" cried a choking, feeble, voice within the carriage, "What can I say? what shall I do?"

"Do! why come out like a man, and face your trouble; not lie howling there like an old woman. You one of the swell mob! why you're the poorest, pitifullest, creature I ever set eyes upon. Come, out with you!"

A groan was the only answer.

"What's the matter?" asked a smartly dressed young man, who had just come up.

"One of the swell mob, my Lord: garrotted a gentleman last week at Sharkaster races; robbed him of five hundred pounds and a gold watch; has been passing forged notes; and two warrants out against him for bigamy. O he's a precious scamp; but excuse me, my Lord, hadn't you better keep your party away. I see the ladies leaving the carriages."—My Lord followed the guard's advice and retreated. .

"Now then," continued that functionary, "our train must be off. Bring him out with

you?" This was addressed to the sergeant who had entered the carriage.

"Fainted right out," exclaimed the policeman. "Fainted dead, and no sham. What a poor chicken-hearted creature! Now then, bear a hand some of you. Give me the handcuffs. There, now lift him out!"

"Why, upon my soul!" cried Sergeant Skeigh—"who ever saw the like of this? What can he have been up to? Why he has got on *petticoats*! A woman's petticoats, under his cloak!"

"O sir, please sir, don't expose me. Take me somewhere out of this crowd, and I'll tell you everything!"

A loud oath burst from Sergeant Skeigh. "We're done, Smellfox! This is not Jack Larkin. 'Tis a *woman*!"

"A woman!" shouted the bystanders, "let's look at her!" "O my eyes!" cried one porter, "she's a beauty!" "Fine black whiskers for a woman!" said another.

Meanwhile the sharp-witted sergeant had unclasped the handcuffs, and lifted his ambiguous prisoner from the carriage. As he did so, the foraging cap fell off, and revealed something in the arrangement of the hair beneath which induced him to give a pull or a shove of some kind, that had the effect of removing a black wig and whiskers, leaving a head of sandy hair,

rather scant and bald at the top, but unmistakeably feminine, in spite of a pair of shaggy eyebrows and voluminous moustaches, which, though a part of the hirsute masculine coiffure, still adhered to the face to which they had been attached.

"O dear, dear! does nobody know me? Guard, don't you know me? Where is the guard?" He was standing behind her, too astonished to speak. "Porter! O you porter with the basket in your hand, don't you know me? You're always so civil to me. O if I could but see Mr. Dove, he would know me. O how fortunate! O Lady Adeliza, O my dear Marchioness, save me, save me!"

The unfortunate Mrs. Soaper, as she uttered these last words, made a plunge forward, shaking off the sergeant of police, and forcing her way through the bystanders, dashed along the platform at her topmost speed towards a group that was standing near the doorway.

"O Lady Kingsbury, O Lord Polesworth, O Lady Flora, Lady Louisa, Lady Adeliza, I'm Mrs. Soaper of Roost! Indeed I am! Tell them you know me, and get me away from this dreadful place!"

There she stood; her eyes glaring; her head bare, black moustaches on her lips, a blue military cloak concealing the whole of her person

and dress, except a small strip of white petticoat.

"Mrs. Soaper!" exclaimed the Marchioness, "why he has moustaches!"

Poor Mrs. Soaper raised her hands to her lips, and tore off the unfeminine addition to her features: but it was too late. Lord Polesworth put himself between his mother and sisters, and the person who addressed them. "Keep her back," he cried to the porters: "she is mad, or drunk; I know nothing about her." And then hurried the Marchioness and the Ladies Fazakerley through the door behind them.

I had by this time made my way to the poor lady. The moment she saw me, she cried out, "O Mr. Dove, have pity on me, and help me! I know I don't deserve it at your hands, but I am sure you won't turn your back upon me in such a strait as this."

Of course I was too glad to be able to befriend her. I said to the bystanders that I had no doubt that she had been the victim of some gross outrage, and that I knew her well. And the guard corroborating my testimony,—(Sergeant Skeigh keeping close at our heels,—but not without whispering a word in the ear of his colleague Smellfox, who forthwith vanished,) we made our escape from the gazing crowd,

and were shown into some vacant sanctum of the railway officials.

What was to be done next? That was settled for us, by a violent fit of hysterics, which to me was more distressing than anything I had yet witnessed. The sergeant had had greater experience. He was well used to the malady : treated the patient as scientifically as if his life had been spent in rescuing the gentler sex from the effects of "*hysterica passio*." He opened the windows, dashed water in the sufferer's face, sent for some brandy, and even felt her pulse, not altogether omitting a sharp expostulation every now and then, and an intimation that if she didn't make haste and come about again, he should never be able to recover her clothes for her.

I am sure the poor lady did her best, but her whole system had had a tremendous shock, and when she revived she was so utterly cowed, subdued, prostrated, that it was as if the soul of the Vicar's wife had migrated elsewhere, and some very meek, not to say pusillanimous spirit was occupying its room.

Skilfully and gently, yet not without narrowly escaping a return to hysterics, the sergeant led the poor lady on to the subject of her adventures.

She had remarked nothing particular about

her companion, she said, till the train had passed the Breezydown Hill Station, the last before the three-mile tunnel, and some few miles in advance of it; but that he then suddenly drew up the window, and looking her full in the face, said, “ ‘ Now, madam; listen to me. Sit still where you are, and don’t attempt to scream or give an alarm; for if you do, as sure as there’s a heaven above us, I’ll shoot you dead.’ And then,” she continued, “taking a pistol out of a side pocket, he cocked it, and held it at me. ‘ Don’t faint, madam, for if you do, you will oblige me to do that which I expect you would rather do for yourself. I have not the smallest desire to harm you, and wish to molest you as little as possible. I am not drunk, ma’am; nor mad, as you might reasonably expect: but I’m worse than either. I’m a criminal flying from justice; and justice is so uncommon strong on the wing now-a-days, that my chance of escape is not worth a rap, unless I can bamboozle the beaks that are on my track. I’m very sorry for you, ma’am: very much distressed at hurting your feelings: and you’re in a confoundedly awkward predicament, from which there is no escape. I trapped you into this empty carriage, because I saw that you and I are about of a size, and to tell you the truth, ma’am, I had made up my

mind beforehand, that, if I should be driven to my present necessities, I would rather avail myself of some tough, middle-aged woman (you'll excuse me) like yourself, than frighten some young girl out of her senses by requiring her to change dresses with me; for that is what we must come to.' "

Here poor Mrs. Soaper grew a little hysterical, but the suggestion of Sergeant Skeigh, that the sooner she roused herself to exertion, and finished her tale, the sooner could her present uncomfortable circumstances be relieved, seemed to revive her, and she found a coherent answer to the inquiry, "Well, ma'am, what did the ruffian say next? We'll have him in custody before the day is over, depend upon it!"

"Well, sir, uncocking his pistol, but still pointing at me, he said, 'Now, ma'am, take off your bonnet.' "

"Which you did?"

"Yes, and he then desired me to double the veil, (which happened to be a large one,) so that when he had the bonnet on, his features would be well concealed. Then he asked me whether my hair was my own, and when I said that it was not, he obliged me to take off my front and give it him. 'And now, ma'am, in half a minute we shall be in the three-mile tunnel. It is as dark as pitch, so your delicacy

need take no alarm. Here is my cloak, and in exchange for it, I must have that silk scarf round your neck, and that velvet jacket, and your silk skirt. I give you my solemn word of honour, ma'am, that I will keep my eyes shut all the while we are in the tunnel: but if you don't effect the change in your toilette before we emerge, I vow to heaven that I will shoot you: yes, ma'am, however distressing it may be to my feelings to imbrue my hands in a fellow creature's blood, I will shoot you, dead as a door-nail.'"

"Well, madam, and like a sensible woman as you are," said the sergeant, "you made no further difficulties, but did as you were bid. By the time you got into the daylight, he was gowned, and you were cloaked. That was all?"

"O no, it was not all. He took off a dreadful black wig and whiskers, and made me put my front on his head, and arrange the bonnet and veil; and then he put his own horrid wig on me, (O how it smelt of bad tobacco!) and worse than that, stuck his black moustaches and eyebrows on my face with some stuff that he took out of his pocket."

"What did he do with his coat and waistcoat?"

"Put them under the seat."

"And by that time, ma'am, I suppose you

were nearing Chadsminster. So he made you take your place in one of the farthest seats from the door, and threatened you with death if you betrayed him when the train stopped?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, ma'am, I shall know how to go on. This is a new dodge altogether, and I hope it will be a warning to you and all other unprotected females, not to be so fond of empty railway-carriages. If you would have put yourself under this gentleman's protection, you would have been safe."

Poor Mrs. Soaper could only groan. I replied for her that I had come in a second-class carriage.

"I hope, sir, you will see her home to her friends as speedily as possible, and not lose sight of her; for after such a fright, she is likely to feel very poorly." And so, assuring Mrs. Soaper that she would recover her lost wardrobe before the day was over, for that Smellfox had been put upon his mettle, and that Larkin had no chance of escape, the worthy sergeant took his leave.

Fortunately, Mrs. Soaper's dressmaker lived at Chadsminster, and the wife of one of the railway-clerks who lived close at hand volunteering the shelter of her house, I set off to communicate with the dressmaker, and to ex-

plain to the Bishop the circumstances which had made us late for our appointment.

I shall not easily forget the manner in which my late antagonist expressed her sorrow for having misunderstood me, and her anxiety to make what reparation she could. She said I had proved myself such a true friend, that it should be the object of her life to show her gratitude. So now, poor lady, I expect she will give me nothing but smiles, and invitations to dinner. I shall be well content if she will persuade the Vicar to cure my smoky chimney.

On my arrival at the Palace, I found the Bishop just mounting his horse. He had waited and wondered, and wondered and waited for a couple of hours, marvelling, as he afterwards said, what there could be in the air of Roost which had the invariable effect of setting the Vicar and Curates by the ears at the end of their first year of acquaintance. I fear he was rather disappointed when he found that his ride was to be curtailed, but disappointment seemed as though it came to him as so entirely a matter of course, he was so used to postpone his own ease and comfort to the welfare, and even for the convenience of others, that without the least apparent effort, he re-entered the Palace, and leading the way into the library inquired as to the circumstances of the delays, and threw himself into

the affairs of Roost with as much earnestness as if they were the subjects nearest to his heart.

What was the first effect produced on his Lordship by the recital of poor Mrs. Soaper's adventure it is not necessary for me to describe here particularly, for whatever else I may forget, through the caprices of a very ill-disciplined memory, which is apt to lose remembrance of everything which it ought to retain, and to retain everything which it ought to let pass into oblivion, I shall never forget that: and his Lordship positively called his wife out of the drawing-room, and made me repeat to her what I had already related to himself. The Soapers, I began to perceive, were pretty generally known in the diocese, and their foibles were a source of amusement to many who after all, were, I dare say, as full of infirmity as themselves. It is very well for us if our friends have no more serious matters to lay to our charge, when they talk us over, as friends *will* talk us over, behind our backs. For my own part, I should be glad if I could think that I laid myself open to no more serious charge than that of exhibiting some absurd weaknesses, and childish inconsistencies.

Whatever were the feelings with which the Bishop heard of Mrs. Soaper's misadventure, one thing pleased him greatly; it was the opinion I expressed that the events of the day

would produce a general amnesty, so far as I was concerned. "Nothing," said he, "distresses me more than to be appealed to in these sort of cases. Of course I am very thankful if I can do good, and soothe sore places. 'Beati pacifici.' But generally speaking there lies at the bottom of these squabbles such a frightful amount of the most contemptible qualities of our fallen nature, that I dread exceedingly the being called upon to decide who is right and who is wrong. In the first place, I know beforehand that I shall satisfy nobody, for my decision is sure to be, 'You are all wrong together.' In the second, I am disposed to think that such arbitration only tends to intensify bitterness. The fact of having nasty little acts of spitefulness discussed which never ought to be discussed at all, gives them an increase of weight and importance. It always seems to me that incumbent and curate should act like husband and wife. They cannot but see each other's infirmities, and must, more or less, suffer from them. But the moment either party begins to *speak* of the frailties of the other, it is as injurious as when the same thing is done by husband or wife. The only method of getting on comfortably with our fellow-labourers in any field of exertion, is to bear and forbear, for His sake Who bore all for us. And we of the clergy

are bound more than any other class of men to set an example in this respect. We, above all men, are called to be 'not self-willed, not soon angry . . . sober, just, holy, temperate.' Well, my good friend, I am rejoiced that the threatened combustion only ends in smoke. But, by the way, I suppose you have found out by this time why I rather regretted your accepting that curacy; and I should be glad for your own happiness to see you in an independent position; but I am very glad that you went to Roost. Lord Kingsbury tells me that he sees progress in many ways, in which, till lately, there was none. And now, what shall we do for this poor lady? If she is too tired to go home, she shall have a quiet room here, and none of us will molest her, or ask her to recount her adventures. In short, if in any way we can minister to her comfort, suggest to us the manner, and it shall be done."

I replied that I believed that the sympathy which had just been expressed would, when conveyed to Mrs. Soaper, do more to restore her to herself than anything that could be devised till she could reach home. And so I took my leave, under circumstances how different from those which I had anticipated, when I left home in the morning; for I then felt that even if matters were wholly decided in my favour,

(which I thought they ought to be) the decision would not compensate for the angry feelings which, it was but too likely, would be engendered, and only make matters more uncomfortable than ever, at Roost.

On my arrival at the station I found Mr. Sergeant Skeigh as good as his word. Detective Smellfox had soon got upon the right scent, and after a severe chase Jack Larkin was overtaken in a ploughed field. Brought to bay, his pistol, aimed at the constable's head, missed fire. Thereupon ensued a close grapple, and a vigorous wrestling match, in which, after a severe tussle, the culprit was thrown flat upon his back upon the unctuous clay. Alas, for the velvet bonnet with its cherry-coloured ribbons! it was crushed into a mass too shapeless to be recognized as a bonnet at all! alas, for the velvet jacket, split up the back, and one sleeve wrenched from its socket! alas, for the puce-coloured silk, stamped here and there and everywhere with impressions in red mud of the soles of the constable's boots! for even when Larkin was prostrate he struggled still, and it was a harder matter to get the handcuffs on his wrists than on poor Mrs. Soaper's.

However, the sergeant, as I have said, was as good as his word, for when I arrived at the station there was a messenger waiting for me,

with the dilapidated wardrobe in a basket, and the intelligence that Larkin was safe in his cell. It was deemed needless, with so many charges hanging over his head, and so many warrants out against him, to bring forward Mrs. Soaper as a complainant, at the present moment, with respect to the outrage committed on herself.

It was with no small satisfaction that I placed her in her husband's carriage, when our returning train reached the Botheram Road station. No five-mile walk for me that evening! I must take my seat beside her, and dine at the Vicarage. Poor lady! she was as smart, or smarter, (thanks to the Chadsminster dressmaker) than when she left home in the morning, but in other respects she was so altered that I thought her husband and daughter would hardly know her. In sporting phrase she was "dead beat." And more than that: her whole system had experienced such a shock, that I quite expected, (and the event realized the expectation) that she would have a nervous fever.

For the present, however, excitement kept her from giving way altogether; and the Bishop's kind messages, and hearty sympathy had cheered her as much as she was capable of being cheered. But still she had a load at her heart. It was not that she had been shamefully outraged and

terrified; not that her costly dress had been ruined; not that she had been the laughing-stock of a crowd. No, the trouble lay deeper than all these; and thus she gave it vent:

“O Mr. Dove, to think that the Marchioness and Lady Adeliza should have seen me in such a predicament! To think that I should have appealed to them, and they should have disowned me! Ah! and once disowned in that quarter, is disowned for ever. The Marchioness is the most particular woman living. She has never taken the smallest notice of the Miss Rashleighs since they put on some of their brother’s clothes the night they were acting charades at Barlington Abbey,—their own father’s house. And I,—good heavens, Mr. Dove, she has seen me dressed in man’s clothes from head to foot, and a black wig, and black moustaches, on the platform of a railway station! O she will never forgive it! I shall never set foot again within the gates of Thorswoldestone Castle!”

CHAPTER VIII.

AN APRIL FOOL.

“ — and some have greatness thrust upon them.”

Twelfth Night.

FOR the last three or four months my daily life at Roost has assumed quite a different complexion. I am not altogether satisfied with myself that so it should be, but so it is: and I note the circumstance in order that I may be more watchful, and try and discipline myself more carefully against giving way to depression of spirits, and against having the tone of my mind affected by trifling external circumstances, as has been the case during the earlier part of my residence here. Before Christmas I lived in a smoky room with a blackened ceiling and a dingy paper; and the good folks at the Vicarage turned “a cold shoulder” upon me. I believe the consequence was that I was beginning to think Roost the most dismal spot I had ever seen, its Church the most dilapidated, its school the most ill managed, its peo-

ple the most hopelessly depraved, and the Curate the most unluckily placed man that could be found anywhere.

Now, my chimney does not smoke ; there is a cheerful paper on the walls, and a coat of fresh whitewash over my head. And the Soapers, though very much the same, I suppose, in other respects, are friendly-disposed towards me. So Roost seems to have its full share of sunshine ; the present dilapidation of the Church only suggests what its beauty will be when properly restored ; the short-comings of Mr. Ferrall have spurred me on to see how much may be done with the children under a different system ; among the people I observe symptoms which encourage me, and I begin to think that I am on the whole well suited to Roost, and that Roost suits me. If I could only find a house for my mother, I think the Vicar would not oppose her coming as he did at first, and then I should have nothing to wish for on my own account ; I should be well content to live and die here. I dare say I should not have been half as well content as I am now if I had experienced no reverses of fortune, and if my destiny had been to pass my days in the midst of ease and luxury, as squire of Verdon Hall.

Certainly the discipline of "roughing it," as the expression is, calls forth qualities which can

never be left in abeyance without serious detriment to the character. And, paradoxical as it may seem, I do not think that I have ever had so large a share of real cheerfulness as I have experienced since those losses and crosses fell on us which seemed most likely to destroy it for ever. Autolycus, the rogue, was a good adviser in one respect, at least :

“Jog on, jog on the footpath way,
And merrily hent the stile-a :
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a !”

I am sure I have blessings enough on all sides to encourage me to “jog on” cheerily “inter omnes viæ vitæque varietates” (as runs, if I remember right, the old prayer for such as go on pilgrimage;) ay, and to give me spirit to bound manfully over every stile that threatens to stop me in running the race that is set before me.

And therefore I hope and trust that I shall give way to no more morbid depression of spirits, because there is every now and then a cloudy day. “Some days must be dark and dreary.” But I think that, for the most part, a bracing air accompanies them, to strengthen and invigorate. I have sometimes wondered whether our Vicar’s dyspepsia and hypochondriacism would not disappear, if, instead of liv-

ing in arm chairs with spring cushions, upon three courses and dessert, he was compelled to live on sixpence a day, and to work for it. However, I had better mind my own business, and mend myself, instead of speculating upon the proper method of improving my neighbour. And it ill becomes me to criticize poor Mr. Soaper, for I am sure he has been very kind to me, and has volunteered the concession of several things towards which he was certainly not predisposed, simply because he has seen me anxious about them. The night-school is a case in point; it certainly has answered capitally, and has given me a hold over Jacob Ashe and a score of other wild lads, which I do not think I could have gained in any other way.

And strange to say, this and half a dozen other things which have been my encouragement since Christmas have flowed out of that uncomfortable scene at the Vicarage. But for that, there would have been no appeal to the Bishop; but for the appeal to the Bishop, there would have been no journey to Chadsminster; and but for the outrage committed on Mrs. Soaper during that journey, I suppose I should never have got upon a comfortable footing at the Vicarage.

As it was, they very much overvalued my services on that occasion. I only did by Mrs.

Soaper what common humanity would have obliged me to do by any one in the same distressing circumstances. And as I have said, much too high a value was set upon what was done; but the most remarkable thing connected with the whole business is, that it was not so much the service I rendered Mrs. Soaper on the railway platform that made her my fast friend, as one of a very different kind, with respect to which it was quite a chance whether I had not given dire offence.

When I was talking over the events of that day with Harry,—(whom, I own, I thought positively unfeeling in the view which he took of the disaster,) I could not help alluding to poor Mrs. Soaper's apprehension that the doors of Thorswoldestone Castle would be closed upon her, in consequence of her involuntary masquerading; and I added my conviction that such an exclusion would be felt more keenly than even the treatment she had received from Mr. Larkin.

In this opinion, however, I was altogether wrong, and did the lady great injustice; for a very serious illness was the result of the fright and distress she had undergone, and she was confined to her room for many weeks. The anxiety and alarm produced by her indisposition brought out the best parts of the Vicar's

character, and, for the time the state of suspense lasted, his thoughts seemed always on others, and never on himself.

How one-sided and unfair do I continually find my judgment of others to be! I detect myself laying hold of one foible or defect in their characters, and assume them to be made up of that and nothing else. I suppose the very worst of us have some good and loveable qualities. I will try and see these more, and the others less in those with whom I have to do. I have already found the advantage of so acting as respects the Vicar. I do not conceal from myself his infirmities, but there is more in him than infirmity: and now that I see his good qualities, I find I can make much more allowance for things which I regret, nevertheless, to see in him. He is very sincerely attached to his wife, and I believe it was this, rather than any representations on Mrs. Soaper's part, that induced him to change his tone to me. That I had acted in a friendly way to her in her distress gave me a claim on him which he recognized at once.

To myself Harry took no notice of the communication I had made to him; but while Mrs. Soaper lay sick, a message of inquiry as to her state came down from the Castle, from time to time; and one day the Marchioness herself

called in person,—in her barouche and four,—“all very grand,” as the story-books say, to ask after the invalid. I believe that day was the crisis of Mrs. Soaper’s illness. Her recovery from that time was uninterrupted, and I suspect that her health was entirely re-established by an invitation to dinner at the Castle soon after she was restored to convalescence. While there, it oozed out through Lady Adaliza that the only thing that could have possibly increased the distress of the Marchioness at having failed to recognise Mrs. Soaper at the Chadsminster Station, and to offer all needful assistance, was the rumour that had reached her, that Mrs. Soaper could have conceived it possible that such a cruel misfortune should have in any way altered the sentiments of her friends at Thorswoldestone Castle towards her. And the Marchioness herself took occasion (though, as may be readily imagined, without any allusion to ladies adopting male attire, whether, when acting charades, or on a journey by rail) to mention some very sufficient reasons connected with a scandalous affair in London, for discontinuing her visits to the Misses Rashleigh of Barlington Abbey.

Now, as I was the only person to whom Mrs. Soaper had revealed the apprehension that hung heavy on her soul, and, as there was a link

of connexion between me and the Fazakerley family, through Harry Harley, there was no great difficulty in putting the cap on the right head, and fixing on me as the channel of communication. Half-a-year before, such a step on my part would have created jealousy, and been taken as an impertinent interference, and produced a dire affront. Now, it was felt as a kindness, and received in the spirit in which I should have desired, had I anticipated that my own share in the matter would become known.

From that time forward, Mr. Soaper seemed to trust me, and he permitted me to take my own line in such parish matters as were devolved on myself solely. He allowed me to make some changes at the school, and even backed me up with the weight of his own authority. He made no complaints when I showed that I was more zealous in visiting the sick than had been the custom heretofore at Roost; and if he groaned over a proposal for a couple of weekly cottage-lectures in two remote outskirts of the parish, he yielded the point at last not unkindly. "You see, my excellent friend, that I am not used to this kind of work, and should feel unequal to undertake it in my own person. Some people have a talent for expounding. My very worthy neighbour at Sun-

nymede was, I am told, a capital hand at expounding and catechising. A 1, my good sir ; facile princeps ! But such things are gifts : they come in the natural way, just as much as blue eyes, or a neat ankle. And those who haven't them, can't acquire them. Dear me ! if I felt I had to catechise on the ensuing Sunday, I should have an indigestion after every meal, from my breakfast on Monday, to my dinner on Saturday. We are mysteriously made, Mr. Dove. Mind acts on matter, and matter on mind. Nobody can tell *what* the mind is, or *where* the mind is, but I fully expect that some day or other it will be found to have its habitat, if not actually in the stomach, yet in some very contiguous place. The effects of the state of my stomach on my mind, and of my mind on my stomach, are so intricate, that I really am afraid to watch them, for it invariably makes me nervous. But dear me ! give me a good dinner, well cooked, and my mind, (at any rate for the time,) basks, as it were, in a placid paradise ; while, on the contrary, insufficient food, or tough food, or ill-cooked food, gives me the most frightful depression of spirits, and makes me irritable to a degree which I should be ashamed to think of, were I not satisfied that it is as involuntary as the shivering-fit of an ague. But then I am

satisfied that the villous coat of my stomach is more highly organised, or more sensitive, than that of most men. Indeed, it appears to me that many of my acquaintance, (especially among the Clergy, and—excuse my saying it—more particularly among the unbeneficed Clergy) have no stomachs at all, or stomachs with little or no feeling in them. Poor Sydney, for instance! to my mind that man was, in fact, an ecclesiastical ostrich. He never cared what he ate or drank. I have seen him devour dry bread, and drink water;—nay, even new Cheshire cheese, of the most soft and shocking description, have I known him swallow, lump after lump, for luncheon, till I have positively shuddered at the sight. And then, perhaps, if there was parish work to be done, he would go without food for the remainder of the day! A man has no right to do such things. Our stomachs were given us for a purpose, and to that purpose they ought to be kept. I don't put my tooth-powder into a teapot; why should I put a tough beef-steak, or a leaden dumpling into my stomach? It wasn't made to be so used, and of course resents such usage. But some people never think of this. Sydney did not. You may say that he was a hale man at four-score, and that I was a victim to dyspepsia at forty: but nature gave me a

delicate, sensitive frame, while he was all sinew and bone : a gristly, rugged man, sir, of iron constitution. Had he taken more care, he might have lived as long as old Parr. Had I taken less, I should have been dead and buried twenty years ago. Poor Sydney ! I had a great respect for him. He was not very refined, perhaps, and had some notions which were hardly suited to the nineteenth century ; but he was much looked up to, and he will be a great loss to his parish. Stokes told me this morning that he was fairly worn out, going to sleep like a little weary child at the end of a long day, so tranquilly and happily, that it was quite a pleasure to see him. Poor fellow ! ‘*Sit anima mea cum illo !*’ I am sorry the Marquis is in London. It will make a difference. Charming spot, Sunnymede ! and, in the hands of a man who knew how to make the best of it, would be a Paradise. I have not heard who is likely to succeed my old friend, have you ? I dare say it will be some one whom the Marquis knows well, because it is so close to Thorswoldestone. I wish he would give it me, and make you Vicar of Roost ! Ha, ha, ha ! But, by the way, we were to determine what was to be done about this cottage-lecture. Well, my good sir, settle it your own way : only let it be clearly understood that I cannot make myself respon-

sible for the continuance of the practice when you are absent."

I was glad to have the cottage-lecture established, but sorry to hear the Vicar speak so lightly of one whose life, common consent admits to have been saintlike, and whose dying bed was now, as I understood, the meet termination of a life spent in undivided devotion to his Master's service, and which gave to those who watched around him such glimpses of his deep communings with the world unseen, as if his happy spirit were already half admitted within the veil.

"No smile is like the smile of death,
When all good musings past
Rise wafted with the parting breath,
The sweetest thought the last."

But perhaps the Vicar sometimes speaks lightly when there is no lightness in his heart. Too many of us do this through cowardice or false shame. I believe I have often done it myself rather than reveal the true state of my feelings to persons whom I have not thought likely to sympathize with them. At any rate, I am sure that Mr. Soaper showed real feeling at the funeral, which was one of the most affecting sights I ever witnessed. It took place on the afternoon of one of the last days of March. After a long period of murky skies, and cold north-

easterly winds, there had been some days of soft, genial rain, and as the good old man was laid in his grave, all nature seemed to be crowded with those types,—so abundant in early spring,—of a coming resurrection. Roost being the nearest parish to Sunnymede the Vicar was the obvious person to read the Burial Service, and I presume would have done so, but he was invited, with some of the neighbouring Clergy to take the office of pall-bearer, and so that duty devolved on me, who, being upon no terms of intimacy with the deceased, could not feel the personal loss as acutely as those would who had had the privilege of acquaintance with him, and perhaps of friendship, for many years. But even I could hardly get through my own share of the ceremony with the calmness which is imperative on those who undertake to officiate on such occasions, so contagious was the sorrow of that sobbing crowd of parishioners who were gathered in dense ranks round the grave. Of all, however, that stood there I did not see one who appeared to be in deeper affliction than the Marquis of Kingsbury.

A fortnight has elapsed since the last entry in my journal, for I had nothing particular to jot down except that the Vicar having gone up to London the day after Mr. Sydney's funeral

(I hardly know why the suspicion entered my mind, but from one or two words which he dropped himself, and a vague rumour in the village, I came to the conclusion that he had followed the Marquis to town, with the object of soliciting him to present him to the vacant living) I had some additional amount of parish work on my hands; and that some one, who calculated on my being a greater goose than I really am, tried on the first of April to make an April fool of me. Harry Harley used to amuse himself with sending me two or three Valentines yearly, when he was in the full swing of boyish mischief, but he is sobered down now, and at any rate I am sure that if he thought me a vain blockhead, he would be the last person to lay a trap for me by which my infirmity would be exposed to the world. He loves me too well.

However, I am not at all sure that vanity may not have been growing up in me, in some unsuspected way: and I think a letter I received this morning may be an evidence of it.

*"The Palace, Chadsminster,
"April 9th.*

"DEAR MR. DOVE,

"We are thinking of making a movement in the diocese for the general establish-

D D

ment of night schools. The reports of the Rural Deans as to the age at which the children leave the church schools present so very sad a picture, that something, I feel, should be done immediately, to afford opportunities of further education to those who have left school, and who at present have no care bestowed upon them. I understand that you have tried the experiment of a night school at Roost with considerable success during the past winter, and I should like to have some conversation with you on the subject. As the public meeting at the Town Hall is to take place on Thursday, I should feel particularly obliged if you would be at the Palace at noon to-morrow.

“Always very faithfully your’s,

“EDWARD CHADSMINSTER.

“The Rev. R. Dove.”

Now I feel very tolerably certain, that it could only be through my own conceited chattering about my hobby to some of the neighbouring Clergy that anything respecting our Roost night school could have reached the Bishop’s ears. No one but myself and the lads knew anything about it. Such egotism, (supposing the affair to have been an unqualified success, which it is not) would have been very reprehensible; and is altogether too bad, as matters

are. I suspect that I have a great deal of pharisaical leaven working in me, and that one of my strongest actuating motives may be a vehement thirst to "obtain the praise of men." I must look more closely into the feeling which influenced me, and increase my watchfulness.

Midnight. April 11. I hardly know how to take up my pen to record the events of the last twenty-four hours: yet weary and confused as I am, I had better put them down at once, and while they are fresh in my memory, that so, if my life should be spared, I may refer to them as a fresh instance of the mercy and loving-kindness which have been following me all the days of my life. "In Domino laudabitur anima mea: audiant mansueti, et lætentur!"

When I arrived at the Palace, I was shown into the Bishop's library, and was received by him with his usual kindness. After he had questioned me upon the points on which he was eager for information, he patiently listened to me, and gave me the opportunity, for which I had felt very eager, of explaining to him that the very novelty of my attempt to civilize the rough lads at Roost would be sure to make our night school a success for a year or two, and that the real test of the value of the plan adopted there would be in the state of things three or four

years hence. I told him that I was already aware of several great mistakes that I had made, and I added that if I lived to another winter, I should modify my arrangements very considerably. I also ventured to say that as his Lordship was probably aware that there were parishes in his diocese where the plan had been in operation for some years, it would be a great kindness if he would inform me where, in his judgment, I should see the system of night schools most efficiently carried out.

"Ah," said he, sighing, "we have lost our best man : and an irreparable loss he is ! Poor Sydney beat us all at this sort of work. His catechetical instruction was the most admirable I ever heard. There is nothing like him left behind ! By the way, Mr. Dove, Sunnymede is, I think, the next parish to Roost, and the presentation in the Marquis of Kingsbury ; have you heard who succeeds him ?"

"No, my Lord."

"Have you heard whether it has been offered to any one ?"

"No, my Lord."

I thought the Bishop gave an odd, searching look at me when he asked this last question, so much so that I felt the colour rising in my cheeks ; but I considered that I had no right to allude to my suspicions as to the object of Mr. Soaper's visit to London.

"No rumours on the subject afloat, are there?"

"Why, my Lord, I so seldom leave home, and hear so little of the gossip of the day, that there may be a score of rumours without my hearing one of them. The only report of the kind which has reached me is that Mr. Soaper is to be the new Rector of Sunnymede."

"Can you keep a secret, Mr. Dove?"

"Yes, my Lord, I hope so."

"Well, then, I happen to know that your Vicar applied to the Marquis two or three days after Mr. Sydney's funeral."

"To tell your Lordship the truth, I half suspected it. I should think a smaller parish than Roost would suit Mr. Soaper, and that he would be equal to the work of it. I am sure I should be glad to see him where he would be more comfortable than he is at present."

"I have not a doubt you would, Mr. Dove: but there are other things to be thought of besides Mr. Soaper's comforts. To continue my confidence: he made his application, and the Marquis fairly told him that he had other views with respect to the living, and that he would not give it to any one who was not prepared to carry out to the letter, and in his own person, the system which the late Incumbent had been building up for many years. And upon this, Mr. Soaper, very much to his credit, told the Mar-

quis that he saw the error he had committed, and that he honoured Lord Kingsbury for his determination. There are good points about Mr. Soaper."

"Very many, my Lord. Very many more than would be found out by a casual observer or a hasty judge."

"And this is all you know about Sunnymede?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Very extraordinary. Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure, my Lord, . . . except . . ."

"Except what?"

"So absurd a matter, that I really am ashamed to mention it. I am certain your Lordship will not let it go further; but perhaps I ought to tell you that some one has been making rather a mischievous use of the Marquis's name. It was a bad joke enough, but some people are very thoughtless, and imagine themselves justified in trying to impose on their neighbours by any deceit they can devise on the 1st of April. Probably the same person who attempted to make an April fool of me, has tried the same experiment on half-a-dozen of the neighbouring Clergy."

"Well, Mr. Dove, but you have not told me what the experiment was: what was it?"

"I beg your Lordship's pardon for getting

so confused, but I should have explained. Here is a letter which I got by the post on April-fool day, purporting to be from the Marquis of Kingsbury, and actually offering *me* the living. Of course I was not taken in for a moment: I believe I was a goose for not burning it at once."

"Well, this beats anything I ever heard of!" exclaimed the Bishop. And covering his face with his hands, he fairly rocked in his chair with laughing.

"I don't wonder your Lordship says so! I believe I should have laughed as much as you, only I didn't like the Marquis's signature being forged."

"You know the Marquis's handwriting?"

"No, my Lord, I never saw it: but you see the letter is written on good paper, and is plausibly got up, though the envelope has only a flower for the seal, and I dare say Lord Kingsbury always seals with his arms; but my correspondent would hardly venture to imitate *them*."

"Upon my word, I am not so sure of that," said the Bishop, more gravely, but still highly amused. "May I read the letter?"

I gave it him; he read it more than once, and as he returned it he said,

"Well, do you know, Mr. Dove, this is just

the sort of letter which, under such circumstances, I should have expected the Marquis to write. It strikes me as a very admirable one."

"Yes, my Lord, that was the only thing that pained me about it. The letter being what it was,—a trap for making an April fool,—it was a mere jesting with a most solemn subject."

"And how long have you had this letter in your pocket, Mr. Dove?"

"For these ten days, my Lord. I got it on the 1st of April, and to day is the 11th."

"Now then, Mr. Dove, I must confide another secret to you. If there has been an attempt to make an April fool of you, so has there of me. Only the attempt on my credulity comes later in the month. Look there," said he, holding out a letter in its envelope, "I got that the day before yesterday, and it was, in fact, the chief cause of my sending for you to come here to-day."

I could not help starting as I compared the two letters; the handwriting seemed indetical. I said so.

"Yes," said the Bishop, "and the remarkable thing is that Lord Kingsbury and I have been frequent correspondents for these twenty years, so that I have no excuse for being taken in. Now read it, Mr. Dove."

" St. James's Square,

" April 8th.

" MY DEAR LORD,

"In answer to your note, I am happy to say that there is no need of your coming up to town at present. The ministers have got frightened, and postpone, for the present, their Bill for legalizing the marriage of brothers and sisters, and for the extinction of Church Rates in rural parishes, by pulling down all Churches in places where the population is less than five hundred. But if the Whigs continue in office, these measures will certainly be introduced next year, and, I understand, supported by their three new Bishops.

"I hope, if you see, or can make a reason for seeing, Mr. Dove, the Curate of Roost, you will use your influence with him to accept my dear old friend Sydney's vacant cure.

"I wrote to him as long ago as the 31st of March, making him the offer, and urging his acceptance of it. But not one syllable have I heard in reply. He is not likely to be away from home, so near Easter, and therefore, I can only suppose that his extreme conscientiousness has rendered it difficult for him to make up his mind.

"For myself I can only say, that the more I have reflected on the subject, the more satisfied

I am that he is the proper man for the position, and I have learned within these few days that poor Sydney, a week before his death, (in alluding to some things I had told him about Mr. Dove,) said to William Baker, 'That is the kind of man whom, if I had the choice, I should wish to succeed me here.' Therefore, my dear Lord, use what influence you may have to induce Mr. Dove to accept the charge, for *Sydney's sake*.

"Ever your's most faithfully and sincerely,

"KINGSBURY.

"The Right Rev.

"The Lord Bishop of Chadsminster."

"There! Mr. Dove," exclaimed the Bishop when he finished reading the letter,—a task in which I had fairly broken down, "What do you think of that?"

I was so confounded, that I could give no answer, and burst into tears.

"Well, my good friend," said he, gently laying his hand on my shoulder, "think it over. I will leave you in peace for a while. You shall not be disturbed. I know where you would seek for counsel!"

So he left me.

And so the end is, (though I can hardly rea-

lize the fact as I write the words,) that I go to Sunnymede, to a parish in which I shall have the advantage of the wisdom and experience of Mr. Sydney developed in an established system, to help my own inexperience, and incompetency; to a place within easy reach both of Harry, and (so I am sure I must call him) of my kind friend at Thorswoldestone, and to a parsonage which will be a comfortable home for my mother and Mary.

All seems bright and prosperous,—like the dawning of a summer's day.

Nay, not that! Rather let me look at it as a gleam of sunshine towards eventide, to cheer and encourage me to run with patience the race that is set before me, and to strive with redoubled exertion to save my own soul, and the souls of them that hear me, before the night cometh in which no man can work.

Surely mercy and lovingkindness have followed me all the days of my life! Surely none was ever more graciously dealt with than I! So much the more reason, then, that I should remember that the time is short, and that Sunnymede is not *Home*, but a pilgrim's tent by the wayside.

It is a lovely spot, and I might well be content to linger there; but it behoves me to bear the one thought on my mind that the time is

short, and that to linger or look back is ruin. Be it mine to bear before me, and realize in my daily life the noblest sentiment that ever fell from the lips of a teacher of error,—the words which Mahomet uttered, as gazing on the verdant plains, and gushing streams of Damascus, he turned his back on the alluring sight, and refused to enter the city: “Man,” said he, “can have but one Paradise; and my Paradise is fixed above!”

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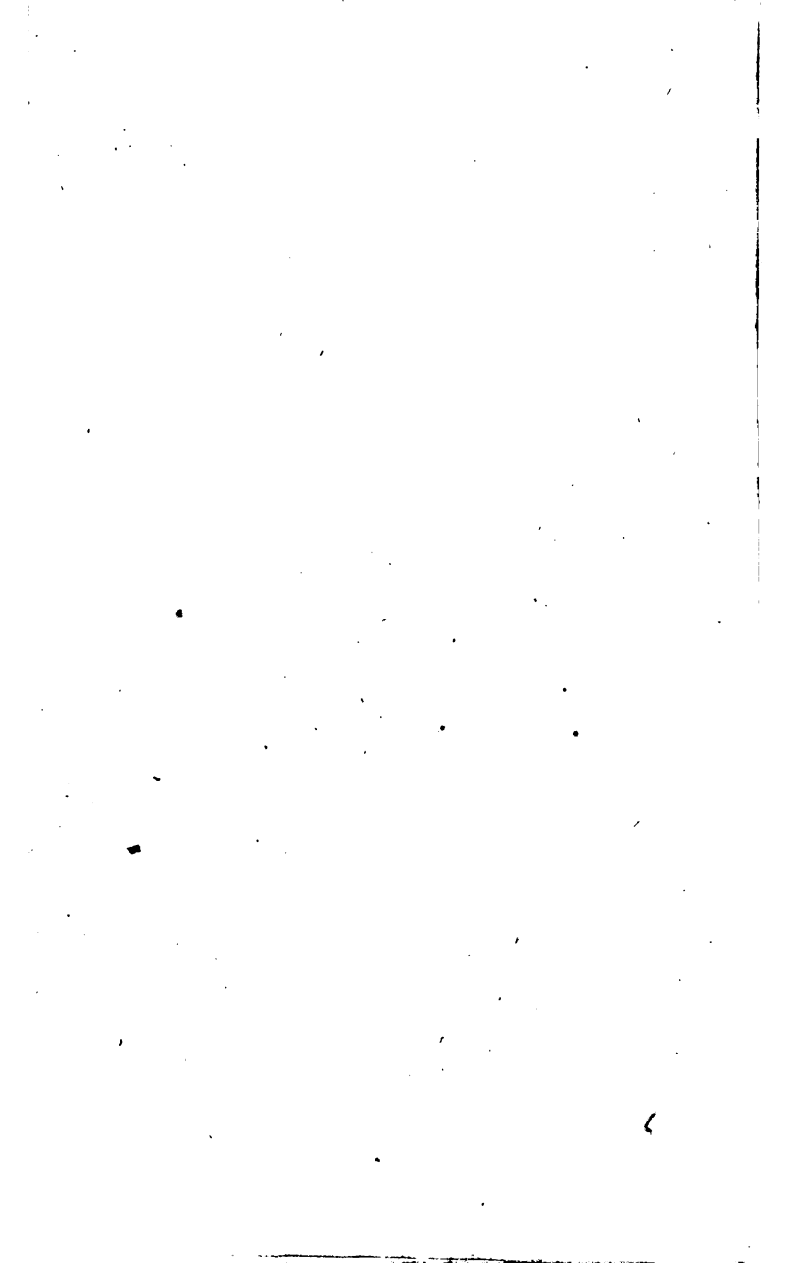
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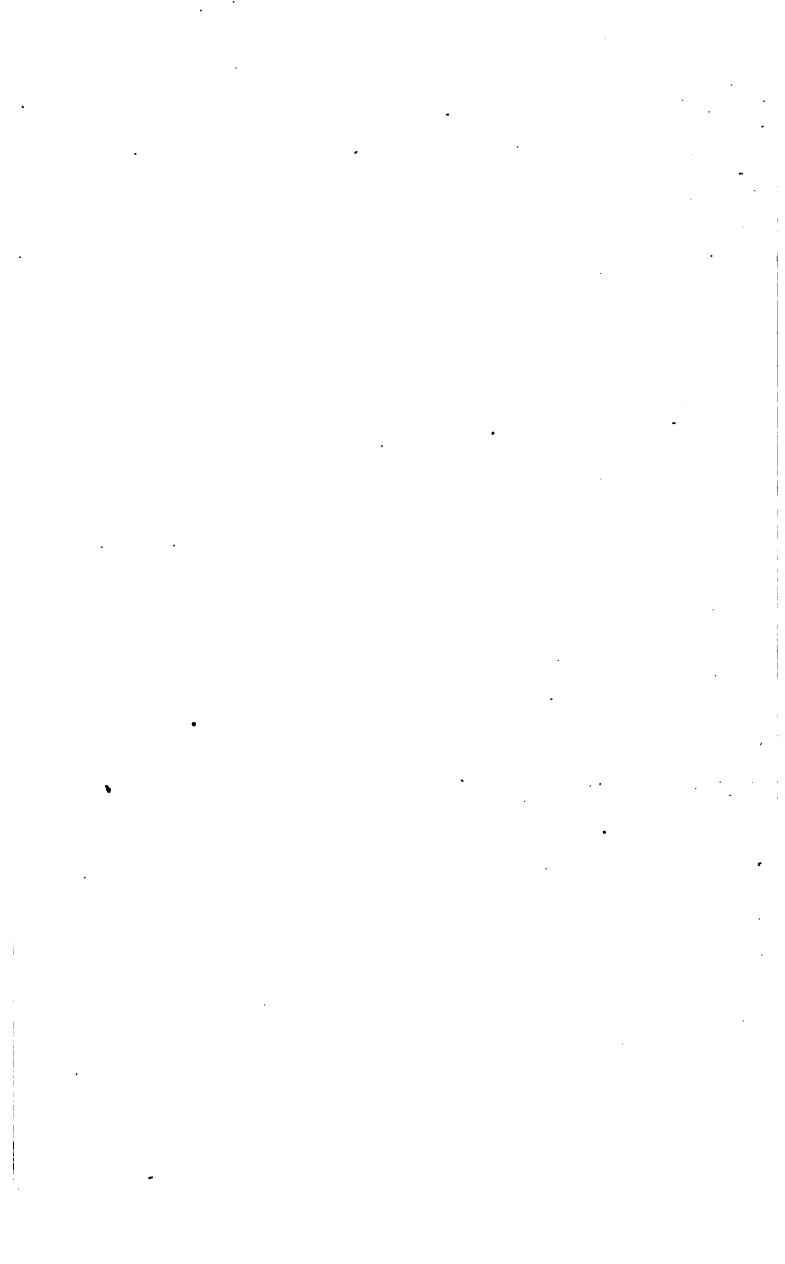
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